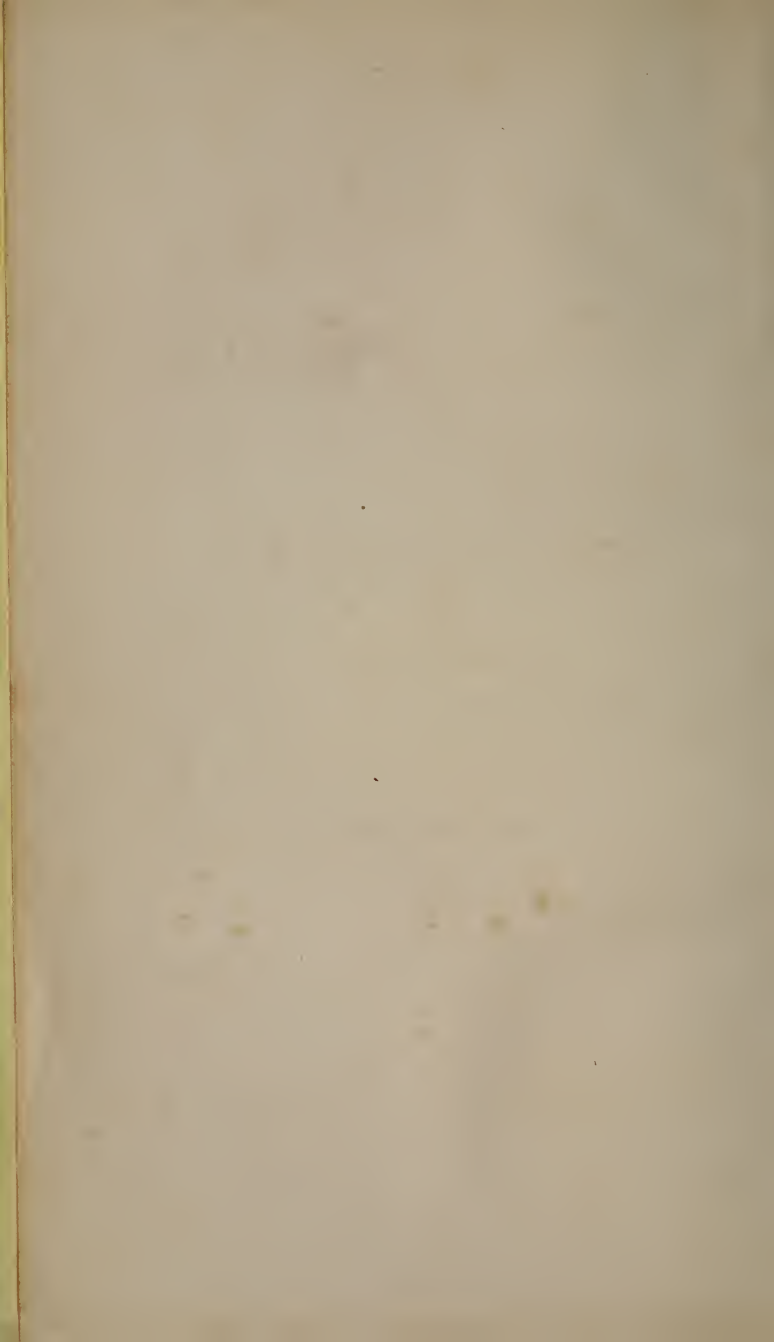


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THE
HUNGARIAN CASTLE.

BY
MISS PARDOE,
AUTHOR OF "THE CITY OF THE SULTAN," &c. &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLS.

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THE HUNGARIAN CASTLE.

CHAPTER I.

ON the following morning a bright change had come over the face of nature. A rapid thaw had commenced : and when the fair hands of the ladies drew aside the heavy silken curtains of their beds and casements, they were compelled to turn their eyes from the dazzling glare of the snow over which the sunlight had flung a mantle of glory. The stalactites that had fringed the window-sills were dropping away in tears ; and the monotonous splashing of the large drops upon the half-frozen surface beneath, was more welcome to many of the young ears upon which it fell than any music in the world, save indeed we except the waltzes of Strauss and Lanner ; for it told of coming eman-

cipation, and brought vivid fancies of Vienna and its gaieties pleasantly before them; and as they stood and watched the large flakes of snow falling from the pine trees, and saw the dark branches rebound as the weight was removed, they seemed to be emblems of their own hearts.

All was clamour and congratulation when the party met at breakfast. Arrangements were made for the road; and those whose travelling preparations were the most luxurious, were proffering seats and furs to their less well-appointed friends; while at the conclusion of the meal little knots were formed to discuss future proceedings, and many a gallant cavalier's hopes and prospects turned upon the decisions of that important half hour.

Youth is very sanguine—and who could wish it otherwise? Doubt, suspense, and misgiving are the handmaidens of maturity: the age of hope rejects such fellowship. The wish is scarcely breathed ere its fulfilment is anticipated, and so it was in the present instance. It was a glorious thaw! and in honour of its advent, many a hoarded piece of gold was trusted to the hazard of the die

that day, which would have been divided and subdivided from sheer prudence, and to protract the enjoyment of its risk, had the frost still continued; many a meerschaum was smoked beside the open gate in the cold air, which would have been emptied in a warm nook or inhaled in the stable, had the prospect been less cheering; while among the ladies, some even went so far as to consign their embroidery frames to the hands of their maids, in order that they might be carefully packed ready for transport to the capital. Servants, ordered and counter-ordered, almost in the same breath, were hurrying about in every direction; the yelping of the hounds who scented the change of atmosphere, rang out on the clear air; snatches of song and laughter came to the ear at intervals from every side of the castle; and for the moment the party who had met together to enjoy each other's society, and many of whom had left no measure untried to secure an invitation, appeared to be as anxious to part as though dissension had sprung up among them; so tenacious is human nature of everything coercive, even when the restraint is merely the temporary effect of the elements.

The evening meal was gay and brilliant. The trickling, splashing, and cracking of the yielding ice filled up the intervals of the conversation; nor did even the blood-red tinge which pervaded the whole of the spacious hall, when the setting sun poured all the beams of its glory through the high western window, produce one feeling of misgiving or anxiety as to the duration of the thaw which had been welcomed with so much animation.

With joyous faces and merry laughter the circle was at length formed about the ample hearth, and preparations commenced for a renewal of the Traditions. The last evening! Who were to be the chroniclers of the last evening? They once more appealed to chance, and the lot fell on the Baron Pratnayér, one of the host's most cherished friends; and as such, entitled also to a particular introduction to the reader.

The Baron was a German; one of those half-brilliant, and half-melancholy seeming individuals, who speak comparatively seldom; but who never utter a sentence which is not worthy of remembrance. In person he was rather above the middle height, strongly and firmly moulded, with an

appearance of great muscular strength. His hair and moustache were darker than is usual among his countrymen ; and were in his case deepened into greater manliness by a large and full blue eye, so deep as at times to appear almost black ; an effect enhanced by a peculiar habit which he had acquired of dropping his upper eyelids very low when looking attentively at any given object. Without a shade of foppery, the nice and careful arrangement of his costume, in which the most beautiful cleanliness was combined with the most unaffected simplicity, made him remarkable in society ; while the great and extensive stores of his mind, poured out as it seemed, unconsciously, and without either effort or assumption, made his friendship as valuable as it was agreeable.

Without either personal vanity, literary pretension, or any prejudices which might have produced a jarring discord in the well-ordered harmony of his mind, it was not wonderful that the Baron Pratnăyer was a welcome and an honoured guest in every circle ; and the rather that when he talked nonsense, as clever people only *can* talk it, he never suffered his wit to wound, nor his fancy to wrong his judgment ; and all who listened to him

felt at once that although he was a man whose talent almost amounted to genius, his nature was as simple as that of a child, and his heart as warm.

Such was the person towards whom all eyes were turned on this eventful evening ; and each was aware that although not a Hungarian by birth, there was no individual present who was more conversant than himself with the history, the struggles, and the chivalry of their country ; and many a bright eye grew brighter during the momentary silence which followed the drawing of the lots, as the young Baron, without one attempt to evade the task, instantly began to search his memory for an appropriate legend.

He had not long to pause ; a smile wreathed his handsome lip for an instant, and then he said courteously : “ The difficulty of my position is not to find a tradition of Magyar gallantry, but to decide on which I shall select ; for truly, to look back over the history of Hungary for the last three centuries, it would almost seem that she had been the prey of foes without, and feud within, merely to afford to her heroic sons an opportunity of proving the value of their blood. I even fear that my election may not be so judicious as I would fain make it ; for I

confess that so little did I anticipate being called upon to become the chronicler of a country I so much admire and reverence, that I have never sought to renew my memories; but have rather listened to the tales which have been told, without a misgiving of my own possible co-operation; and thus I seize one of the first which rise to my recollection, satisfied with the conviction that I cannot in any case fail to adduce some record of Hungarian chivalry, and Hungarian patriotism."

"Our cause will be safe in your hands, I know, Baron;" said the host, with a proud smile of patriotism. "Had all your countrymen felt towards the persecuted Magyars as you have ever done, Hungary would have been rife with monuments of present greatness, instead of records of past suffering."

The Baron bowed his thanks with one of his own peculiarly sunny smiles; and then without further preface, commenced his tale.

THE DEFENCE OF SZOLNOK.

THE establishment of Turkish supremacy in Hungary through the supineness of Zápolya, cost the country some of the noblest blood that she could boast; and made the ruin and devastation

everywhere apparent only an extended picture of what existed at every hearth. The adherents on both sides were alike the sufferers in this struggle, and as Ferdinand or Zápolya in turn prospered, the adverse party were comparatively victimized; and meanwhile the Turks looked on from their proud pinnacle of power, clutching at every advantage which was missed by either of the contending factions, and profiting by every turn of the fearful game.

This fact, which might fairly have been inferred ere a blow was struck, was only discovered too late by the hostile sovereigns; for it was not until after twenty years of suffering that a treaty was concluded between Ferdinand, and Isabella (the widow of Zápolya), by which Hungary and Transylvania were ceded to the same crown.

Obstacles so great as to have at first appeared insurmountable, had impeded the negociation in every stage of its progress; and it was only by the most extraordinary caution that the secret of its existence was concealed from the Turks, who would at once have set it aside; and the indignation of Sultan Solyman was comparatively great when this important transaction came to his knowledge only

after the signing of the treaty, when he felt that his own opposition had become powerless; and that he had not only never been consulted, but that he was actually wronged by both parties, although acknowledged as the guardian and protector of John Sigismond.

But his wrath reached its climax when he discovered not only the cession of Transylvania, but even of those portions of Hungary which had been occupied in the name of the Queen; the whole of which were, according to the treaty, to revert to Ferdinand; and in great ire he swore that not only would he become master of the whole of both countries, but that he would expel every German from the land for ever.

Solyman was not wont to threaten and forget: his deeds followed fast upon his resolves; and on this occasion active preparations were instantly commenced for the important campaign which he meditated. The Grand Vēsir Achmet was dispatched with an army of one hundred thousand men, chiefly Asiatics, to accomplish the total conquest of Hungary, much of which was already in the possession of the Crescent; and imperative orders were for-

warded to Ali Pasha who commanded at Buda, and to the chiefs of the other Turkish fortresses, to commence hostilities against the Christians, and to pursue them even to the death.

News of these threatening measures soon reached the ears of Ferdinand; who, inferior in judgment to Solyman, had surrounded himself by a crowd of generals, all of whom, if we except Nicholas Salm, were inadequate to perform the duties required of them; and in the fearful emergency of the moment he dispatched an army under Castaldo against the Grand Vēsir, where this general played his part so ill that in the first engagement which ensued at Szegedin, he lost five thousand men, was totally defeated, and compelled to retreat. Satisfied with this essay, he added cowardice to ill judgment; abandoned the cause to its fate; and looked quietly on without further interference, when Achmet drew up his forces before Temesvar—next to Belgrade the most important fortress on the frontier—and while the despot of Wallachia poured his troops into Transylvania.

The Count Stephen Lossontzi, a brave man, and an able soldier, defended himself in the most determined and chivalrous manner; and by his gallant

resistance, compelled Achmet ultimately to summon the Pasha of Buda to his assistance. The call was obeyed, and a hundred and sixty thousand men were speedily in arms against the devoted fortress—the importance of its capture having compelled them to use all available means to secure it; but not until famine, and a total exhaustion of ammunition, rendered all further resistance impossible, did Lossontzi surrender, and permit the entrance of a Turkish garrison into the castle which he had so pertinaciously defended. Having established a sufficient force at Temesvar to secure the safe possession of their prize, the Moslem army next marched successively on Lippha, Salgo, and Dregel; and all these fortresses were alike lost to the Christians, either by the cowardice of their commanders, or by the overwhelming strength of the enemy.

One solitary castle was left in the power of its rightful masters throughout all the lower district of the Theiss; and that one, from whose battlements the blood-red banner of the Infidel had never yet floated, was the Castle of Szolnok—a place of immense importance, alike from the superior nature and great strength of its fortifications, and from the

fact that it contained a very considerable store of ammunition, which had been deposited there for security. It was confided to the government of Lorenzo Negáry, the representative of an ancient family which had been ennobled for their military prowess by Geisa II. : and he was well worthy of the proud name he bore, as well as of that which he had acquired for himself, of "the Pillar of Christianity."

The garrison of Szolnok consisted of about seven hundred and fifty men—a medley of Germans, Spaniards, Italians, and native Hungarians—and nature had been so well seconded by art in the erection of the fortress, that it appeared almost impregnable. It stood on the northern bank, at the junction of the rivers Theiss and Zagyar ; and was surrounded by a wide ditch and lofty walls, towering above which were mighty bastions to protect the minor buildings.

Twenty-four heavy field-pieces, two thousand five hundred guns of different dimensions, upwards of one thousand barrels of powder, great store of cannon-balls, iron, lead, and other species of ammunition, together with provisions for a year, in case of siege ; but above all, the tried and known valour of

its Commander, and his lieutenant Gabriel Pekry, seemed to afford a sufficient guarantee for the safety of the castle.

With an advanced guard of twenty thousand men, Ali, then Pasha of Buda, sat down before Szolnok, resolved to effect its conquest at any cost of time or blood; and having in vain summoned it to surrender, he at once commenced hostilities, and opened a sharp fire against the fortress, which he continued without intermission during eight days. He was not, however, long in making the discovery that he had no longer either a coward or a novice to contend against; for the manner in which the defence was conducted, soon convinced him that unless he had immediate reinforcements from the Vēzir, he must raise the siege; and he was so fully imbued with this conviction, and wrote so urgently when he demanded aid, that the Vēzir arrived in person at the head of his army, by forced marches, and was received with loud acclamations, and with the firing of cannon.

His troops poured on, battalion after battalion, legion after legion, horse and foot, until they covered a surface of five English miles; and their motley and picturesque appearance interested even the

besieged. There were the Janissaries with their flaunting banner, their audacious bearing, and their gleaming arms; the Arabs, with their small fleet coursers, and their long pliant lances; the body-guard, with their plumed head-gear and jewelled trappings; and above and amid all, waved the gilded standards and floating horse-tails of the different Pashas. As the mighty mass gradually disposed itself around the fortress, the gleaming of the rapidly-raised tents added a new feature to the scene; and when the first burst of half barbarian welcome partially subsided, such was the number of the enemy, that the voices of the men, the trampling of the horses, and the jingling of the small silver bells upon their housings, were all audible in the castle; and there were not a few within its walls who were inclined to compute the foe at ten times their already enormous amount, and who began to feel that they would fain escape the forthcoming struggle.

The Count Negáry could not conceal from himself the mortifying truth; and while his heart burnt within him with indignation and disappointment, he hastily assembled his garrison; and after having addressed to them words of encouragement and re-

proach, and reminded them that they were about to contend not only for their lives and for their honour, but also for their altars and their faith, he knelt down in the midst of his troops, and drawing his sword from its scabbard, took a solemn oath that he never would surrender while he had life.

Affected by his noble self-devotion, and carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, all repeated the oath after him ; and the generous Negáry again believed that he should save the cause of Christianity, by checking the haughty insolence of the Moslems. But the sun of the second day after the scene we have just described had not yet set, when unequivocal symptoms of mutiny manifested themselves in the garrison ; and he learnt that the besieging army had left no expedient unattempted to corrupt his people ; the men had been tampered with on all sides, and in all manners ; bribes and threats had alike done their work, for they had been promised magnificent rewards for treachery, and warned that no vengeance would be held too deadly, should they ultimately be taken after a prolonged resistance.

The fate of the garrison of Temesvar, which had been cut to pieces after a long and brave struggle,

and its gallant leader Lossontzi barbarously flayed alive, had made a strong and dangerous impression on the troops of Negáry; and instead of exciting them to revenge, had only crushed them into cowardice.

As they canvassed the melancholy subject, they gathered strength from their very weakness; and while some, still willing to temporise with their brave commander, talked of capitulating, others, more selfish and more impatient, as well as more dastardly, resolved on compelling him to vacate the castle during the night, and thus provide for the safety of the garrison, while he abandoned the fortress to its fate. All the Italians insisted on the last measure; and, with their national impetuosity, at once rushed into the presence of the Count, and demanded its fulfilment.

Negáry was occupied in writing a despatch to the main army, and the trusty and secret messenger who was about to risk his life in its delivery stood before him, awaiting the closing of the packet and the final thanks and orders of his general, when the rebel troop forced themselves into his presence. He at once understood their errand; and a smile of

withering contempt sat on his lip, as he rebuked them for their unmannerly intrusion, and bade them withdraw, and endeavour to forget that they had been about to stigmatize themselves as cowards. But he spoke in vain : pride, honour, obedience, all alike had failed under their dastard fear ; the bond of discipline was rent asunder, and amid a storm of words, and a tumult of passion, they imperiously insisted upon leaving that very night, a fortress, of which they declared that, in order to pamper his own pride, he sought to make a human shambles ; and in conclusion, they bade him lead them to the camp of Castaldo, whose superior prudence would be their security and their trust.

This last blow smote upon the heart of the strong man ; and as Negáry glanced down upon his weapon, and then raised his eyes to the loud brawlers about him, a gush of tears fell on his scarred and wasted cheek ; and he besought of them as a friend and as a father not to make the memory of that day a by-word of infamy—he talked to them no longer as their general, for they had rejected him—he implored them as their friend ; but with a bitter laugh they flung back upon him that bond also.

When the galling sound fell upon his ear, Negáry hastily brushed away the moisture from his eyes, and raising his naked weapon above his head, he exclaimed sternly : “ This is then your resolve—I have heard and noted it ; and now hear mine. I thank my fate that among all the dastards who now throng about me, I see not one Hungarian—but I might have been sure of this—And I thank it yet again, that all our wide and suffering country, were it to be searched from the Moravian frontier to the confines of Germany, could not produce so foul a band of traitors ! Again I swear to you that from this fortress I never will depart alive, save as its master ; and to this vow I add another, which may more interest yourselves—never to suffer any one among you to quit it as a coward ; but to hold you within its walls as jealously as though you were true men, in order that I may not myself be disgraced through your unworthy means ! ”

The Baron Pekry, who had followed the mutineers into the presence of their general, in vain endeavoured to awaken a better feeling among them ; they would listen to no arguments, and were deaf to all entreaties ; nor did the vow of the brave

soldier to live and die with his friend and chief, shake one resolve.

Baffled, but not rebuked, the mutineers withdrew from the apartment of the Count, only to return when the night-guard had been posted, to demand the keys of a subterranean passage which extended from the outworks of the castle into the open country beyond. They were sternly refused; when one of the renegades had the audacity to raise his hand against the Count, whose forbearance being at length exhausted, with one stroke of his sabre severed it from the wrist, and it fell, a bleeding mass, upon the floor. The enraged band, seeing the fate of their comrade, then rushed upon the betrayed general, and but for the resolute interposition of Pekry would have slain him on the spot; while in the *melée* the keys were wrenched from his girdle.

Their aim accomplished, the rebels assembled tumultuously in the court-yard; and for the last time, Negáry, wounded and bleeding from their violence, staggered into a balcony which commanded their place of meeting, and from thence earnestly exhorted them to return to their duty. Of the whole remnant of his garrison twenty only

answered the appeal ; the rest were intoxicated with the idea of escape and safety from their dreaded enemy.

When the deep shadows of midnight lay long upon the earth, and the pale beams of the moon, like the sickly memory of vanished hopes, fell across the faces of the devoted few who remained true to their trust, they alone, with their chiefs, were left within the walls of Szolnok ; and it was then, when he knew that the traitors had indeed departed from among them for ever, that Negáry, supported by his faithful Pekry, once more stood in the midst of his gallant little band. He was wan and faint, and under the clear blue moonlight his complexion looked livid and ghastly ; yet still there was a noble daring on his brow, and a fire in his large dark eye, which told that the bold spirit was not quenched within him.

For awhile he did not trust himself to speak ; but after glancing a hasty look over the devoted little troop who had clung to him in his extremity, he extended a hand to each, for each had in that hour become to him as a dear familiar friend ; and then, when all had pressed it with a respectful eagerness

that seemed to endow him with new strength, he said slowly and painfully, but in an accent of trustful pride, which made a hero of every man to whom he spoke : “ I must not repine—I dare not—I have lain among vipers, and I have shook them off. My friends, let us pity while we condemn them ; *they* did not fight for their own land ; *we* are all Magyars ! We must die, but we shall all die together ; our country will embalm our memory with her tears ; and none will stand beside our graves, and brand our names with infamy. I will not deceive you—we have no other hope. Let us then, in this solemn hour, devote ourselves fearlessly to the glorious death which awaits us ; let us die, one for all, and all for one ! ”

The pledge was given—earnestly, truthfully—like the vow of the dying, soon to redeem his promise at that tribunal where there is neither evasion nor deceit ; and then Negáry dismissed every man to his respective post, where each was to do the work of three ; reserving to himself the most dangerous, maimed and exhausted as he was ; and claiming his right to the perilous guard at the great gate of the fortress.

These necessary arrangements completed, the gallant leader himself superintended the distribution of an extra quantity of provision to the whole band ; and after again thanking them for redeeming in his eyes the character of his fellow-men, and saving his memory as well as their own from contempt and dishonour ; he shut himself for a time into his chamber to ask a blessing from the Almighty Ruler of all things on this last effort for his country ; and then dressing himself in his most splendid uniform, as though he had been bidden to a court festival, he placed the keys of the fortress in his embroidered girdle ; and unfolding, as he believed for the last time, the banner of his bleeding country, he rejoined his little garrison with the light of courage in his eye, and its calm upon his lip.

Day had scarcely dawned when the Turks, after a temporary cessation of hostilities, resumed their heavy cannonade ; and the massy walls of Szolnok almost seemed to reel under the weight of the missiles which were hurled against them. The fire of the Infidels was but feebly returned, and they were not slow to discover that something very extraordinary must have occurred within the fortress. Resolved to profit

by what might prove to be merely a temporary advantage, Ali, with admirable judgment, at once commanded an assault ; and with loud cries of “ Allah hu ! ” the Infidels rushed furiously to the walls, without encountering any obstacle. But they were no sooner massed together in a dense body within range of the guns of the fortress, than Negáry, who had pointed all his ordnance towards the threatened spot, applied the match to every cannon that he possessed, and swept down whole ranks of his turbaned enemies, as though the breath of the pestilence had passed over them.

The check was, however, only momentary, for the numerical strength of the Moslems being sufficiently great to enable the Vēzir to detach strong bodies of men from the main army, some of the parties thus employed had discovered the unprotected state of the walls in the rear of the fortress ; and accordingly, ascending them without difficulty, they gained the ramparts, and startled the ears of the besieged with their wild cries of triumph. In this emergency Negáry collected his little band about him in the gateway, which was protected by a large cannon loaded with iron chains, balls, and other

missiles, which, as the Turks forced the gate, was fired upon their advancing ranks, and made frightful havoc. But all resistance was vain, for the Infidels, enraged at the wholesale slaughter of their unhappy comrades, leapt with savage shouts over their yet writhing bodies, and poured thick and fast into the castle; and the gallant but attenuated garrison, although they fought like lions, were ere long overpowered.

Deluged with blood, and fainting from no less than seventeen wounds, Negáry sank down, as he fondly hoped, to die; and near him lay stretched his fellow-soldier Pekry, beneath the gun-carriage, surrounded by the ghastly corpses of friends and foes.

The Turks took possession of the long-contested Castle of Szolnok, but it was a victory which cost them dear, for eight thousand of their best men lay dead before the fortress; and it was with mingled feelings of astonishment and rage that they discovered by what a mere handful of Christians they had been so long successfully resisted. Nevertheless, even amid his indignation, Ali could not refuse his tribute of admiration to the heroic conduct

of his adversaries, and intimated that he desired to see their leader, even although he were no longer in life. Search was accordingly made for Negáry; and it was no sooner ascertained that he did not make one of the little band who, pale and bleeding, yet stood apart from their captors in silent and dogged despair, than he commanded that his body should be sought where the dead lay thickest: "For there;" said the Moslem hero, appreciating the valour which had so well tested his own; "he will assuredly be found."

And he was right—the glittering and gorgeous dress dabbled with blood, which betrayed the rank of its wearer, was dragged from amid a pile of slain; and although none believed that he yet lived even the Infidels handled it gently, as it still compelled respect; while Ali himself, as he bent over it for a moment, and wiped away the red stream from the high brow, and the long locks which had so lately shaded it, seemed to forget that he looked upon an enemy and a Christian, and to remember only that this was all that now remained of what had been a soldier and a hero.

The breath of heaven fell cool upon the pallid

forehead of Negáry ; and he had not long been released from the pressure of the dead and dying among whom he had lain so lately, when a deep and labouring sigh announced to the bystanders that life was not yet extinct. Slowly and carefully he was carried into the castle, as well as his lieutenant Pekry, who, although desperately wounded, had also survived ; and every means was used to solace and revive them ; for the Turks were so well aware of the value of both, that they felt convinced of their being gladly ransomed by their countrymen at a heavy sum.

In a few days, when the fever of their wounds had abated, they were conveyed to Temesvar, to await the perfect restoration of their health, and treated kindly, both from respect, and anticipated profit.

John Sigismund Zápolya, whose vacillation of character was for a time the curse of his country, although he had resigned his crown to Ferdinand, had never wholly abandoned the hope of one day resuming his sovereignty ; and he lost no opportunity of gaining over to his interest every noble of influence and reputation, whose principles were politically doubtful. The policy of this line of conduct was

unquestionably more commendable than its honesty, but the fact did not tend to lessen its success; for more than one brave and wealthy noble yielded to the misfortunes of the abdicated prince what he would never have conceded to his authority; and, conscious of this truth, Zápolya lost no time in dispatching one of his secret agents to Temesvar, with courteous greetings to the two heroes of Szolnok, and an offer to redeem them on the instant, if they would pledge themselves thenceforward to his party.

They succeeded only with the Baron Pekry, to whom captivity among the Turks was so full of horror, that he willingly escaped it at any price. Negáry was formed of less plastic material; and, hateful as he felt his position to be, he yet preferred it to what he considered dishonour—He had sworn fealty to Ferdinand—and this he stated to be the only answer which he could permit himself to return to the overtures of Zápolya.

Accordingly, the ransom of his brother-soldier was paid; and Pekry was a free man when he entered the chamber of Negáry to part from him, probably for ever.

“Farewell;” said the Count kindly, but gravely; “I could have wished that my grief at this separation had been less alloyed, and that the memory of Pekry had come across me in the future without a shade over it. Be true to your new master, my old comrade: you have been false to yourself, but you may yet do your duty to others.”

As he spoke he extended his hand to the Baron, and felt a tear drop upon it, ere it was resigned; but he made no comment; and in another moment Pekry left the chamber.

Finding the ransom fail for his principal prisoner, the renegade Achmet Pasha resolved on sending him to Constantinople; a proceeding which had been frequently efficacious in wringing the red gold from the relatives of the captives, who too well knew what the fate of the unfortunates would be on their arrival in the Moslem capital. In the case of the Count Negáry it failed, however; for the ransom was not forthcoming when the condemned prisoners were prepared for their departure, and he was accordingly added to the melancholy band.

Not a sun rose above his native hills during the brief period of his suspense, upon which the sad but

high-hearted captive did not gaze as though he would have cracked his eye-strings; for he knew not, as he looked on each, whether it were not the last that he might ever see in his own land—the last he should care to see until he died!

At length the moment came; and when he had exchanged an abrupt but kind farewell with Ali Pasha, Negáry felt that he was indeed abandoned to a fate worse than death. The journey to the frontier was difficult and fatiguing; but so long as he trod the soil of Hungary, the prisoner cared neither for difficulty nor fatigue; it was when they had passed the boundary that the whole weight of his misfortune fell upon him; and he drooped, less under the unmanly cruelties and inhuman treatment of his captors, than under the influence of his own mental wretchedness.

Amid pain of spirit, and toil of limb, whose very memory made him shudder in after years, he reached, with his companions in misery, the capital of the Infidels. It was on a bright morning that they first beheld the glorious Bosphorus, gemmed with swiftly-darting caiques, glittering in the sunlight, and framed in with lordly mosques and

painted palaces; the blue waters of the Propontis dancing joyously along the marble terraces of the Serai of Amurath; and the giant mountain of Olympus, with its crown of snow, towering vast and tall in the distant perspective; and hopeless and heart-sick as they were, they could not refuse a moment's homage to the masterpiece of Nature which was spread out before them; but despair is a stern task-mistress, and even before a rude blow and a harsh jibe once more hurried them onward, the prisoners had already relapsed into wretchedness.

The galleys of the arsenal received them all; and no contrast could be more sudden, and more utter, than that from the beautiful world without, to this sink of filth, and vice, and misery. Europe probably possesses no other prison whose horrors equal those of the Constantinopolitan galleys—hope cannot enter there—the oath, the lash, and the chain, mingle their frightful diapason with the groans and tears of the captives.

In a few weeks no one, however near in blood or in affection, could have recognised Negáry; and he ceased to struggle against his fate when he found that his family, aroused into energy by his mise-

rable condition, had repeatedly offered a splendid ransom to the Pasha of Buda, which had been sternly and haughtily refused ; and for a long dreary year he abandoned himself to despair, when, in 1553, a ray of hope streamed across his spirit, and he once more began to dream of liberty and his country.

Ferdinand, weary of the war, which was occupying his councils, wasting his army, and exhausting his resources, sent a special mission to Constantinople, consisting of the Bishop of Funfkirchen, Anton Verax, and Zay, to negotiate a peace. By a lucky accident the filth-laden and squalid prisoner of the galleys contrived to approach the party ; and to satisfy them, although with some difficulty, of his identity. After a thousand expressions of sympathy and indignation, the strangers gave Negáry the strongest assurances of their desire to effect his liberation, and their resolution to leave no means untried to accomplish it with all speed ; a consummation which they did not doubt would be the more readily brought to bear, as they had received express directions from the Emperor Ferdinand, who was grateful to him for the constancy with

which he had adhered to the Imperial cause, even to his own ruin, to ascertain whether he yet lived; and in the event of such being the case, to accomplish his ransom at any sacrifice.

But the very earnestness of their efforts only tended to increase the difficulty; for the Turkish ministers no sooner understood that the Christian monarch himself was anxious for the liberation of their captive, than they set aside the subject altogether, by declaring that while so important a measure as that of considering the expediency of a peace was under discussion, it was impossible to entertain any frivolous detail which might be arranged when weightier matters were decided. This subterfuge was so shallow that it was impossible for the disappointed ambassadors to mistake its meaning; and consequently all that they could now do, was to insist upon an interview with the prisoner; in which they told him, not without tears, that they could no longer hold out to him a single hope of freedom, all prospect of a speedy peace being destroyed by the exorbitant demands of the Turks; with which compliance on the part of the Emperor was utterly impossible.

It was a sad sight to behold that crushed and withered man, as he listened to the frightful tale; and then dropped upon his knees before the venerable prelate, to crave of him a blessing which might avail him in his death-agony. Hope was extinguished within him: he believed that he looked for the last time into the faces of countrymen and brothers, and he bowed himself down for that benison which was to anoint him for the burial.

The solemn moment passed by; and the three friends alternately held him to their hearts, and wept over him, and bade him look beyond the grave for that happiness which alone could repay him for all the misery of his present life—and then all was over—they carried away his greetings to the loved ones whom he had left in his own land; his homage to the Emperor, to whom he bade them swear that he was yet happier in his chains as his true servant and soldier, than he could ever have been if free and dishonoured; and his prayers that they would remember him in their orisons, when they once more knelt in a Christian temple to a true God. And so they parted—the Envoys to embark for their own land, with their mission unaccom-

plished ; and the prisoner to his den of dreariness and despair !

Months passed away ; and the waning strength of Negáry led him to hope that death would soon mock the malice of his jailors, and set him free for ever ; when he was one day accosted by the officer of the guard, under whose directions the gang to which he was attached were pursuing their revolting toil. It was the first time that the voice of kindness had fallen upon his ear since the departure of his countrymen ; and as the Moslem questioned him with apparent interest of his country, condoled with him on his unhappy fate, and told him how willingly he would have rendered it less wretched had he dared to do so, the heart of the captive Count swelled almost to bursting ; and in the first moment of emotion, he felt as though he could pour out to this new and unexpected friend all his sorrow and his despair ; but in the next instant, a dark suspicion crossed his mind : this seeming kindness might be a mere plot to entice him into violent language, which would in its turn become a plea for increasing his sufferings, and even taking his life ; and this fair-spoken Infidel an emissary of the Vēzir's.

Acting upon this probability, Negáry curbed his passion, and made short and unmeaning answers to every question; but he was so much weakened by famine and labour, that he was unable to control his tears; and when his country was named, they rained down his furrowed cheeks in such showers that his pride took the alarm, and he was just about to explain to the Moslem that they arose merely from physical weakness, and not from mental cowardice, when on raising his eyes to the face of the stranger, he perceived that he too was deeply moved; nor had he recovered his surprise, when the officer advancing closer to him, whispered in his own language:—"Fear me not, my gallant countryman; I am not here to betray you, for I too am a Hungarian—Receive me as a brother, with love and trust; and within a fortnight you shall be free."

Speechless from astonishment and delight, Negáry could only gaze into the face which was turned towards him, as if he feared to trust the evidence of his ears, and the rather that it was overshadowed by the accursed turban; but the stranger, anxious to convince the bewildered Count of his sincerity,

hurriedly resumed, without waiting for reply or comment from his listener.

“You are surprised ; you must be : but you shall doubt no longer. I am indeed a Hungarian, noble Count, although of obscure blood. My name is Stephen Husza ; my father fell in battle against the Infidels ; and my mother, who followed him to the camp, was made prisoner together with myself, who then a boy of ten years old stood at her side. How well I remember that fearful day ! my father’s gory and disfigured body—my mother’s screams and tears—my own wonder and affright. Alas ! ere we reached Constantinople, I had no longer a parent ; the agony of the past and the terror of the future, added to the hardships and indignities of the journey, killed my poor mother ; and I was at once an orphan and a slave.

“A kind providence protected my helplessness ; for immediately on my arrival in the capital I was purchased from the soldier whose property I had become, by a wealthy merchant of the city, who being childless, adopted me as a son, and reared me with tenderness and affection. His faith became mine ; and I grew up a Moslem in all things, save

that I have ever retained a loving memory of the land where I had a father and a mother, and never knew sorrow ; a clinging to the language with which my ear had first been familiar, and which I have whispered to myself fondly when none were by to listen ; and a firm resolve never to forget the name which I had borne in my childhood.

“ When I had attained to a sufficient age, weary of the monotonous idleness of the harem, I enrolled myself among the Janissaries, and have risen from rank to rank, until I have become an Aga. But I feel that I am not a Moslem in spirit—an Infidel in heart—I pant for the free air of the country of my birth ; for the pure altar of the God of my fathers. I have heard from the other Christian prisoners, that you are not only a brave soldier, but an indulgent master to your vassals, and that even the Emperor himself did not disdain to intercede for your liberation ; and I have now formed my resolve. Only pledge me your honour that you will give me a situation in your household, and that you will never forsake me, and I will deliver you, if deliverance be possible on this side the grave.”

“ Husza ;” said Negáry, as the man paused ; “ I will trust you. You are no renegade, either to your

God or your country, for you were too young when you bound on the turban, to comprehend all that you owed to each. I will trust you ; for your true Magyar blood has asserted itself nobly ; and now it is my turn to offer a pledge. Hear me then while I swear, both as a man and a noble, that I not only accept the aid which you have proffered to me ; but that if you redeem your promise, and that success attends our undertaking, I will settle upon you and your heirs for ever, one of the villages upon my patrimony, with all that it contains ; and never lose sight of your interest and advancement while I have life."

Husza knelt for a brief instant, and kissed the hand of his future suzerain, when there were none by to mark the action ; and then revealed rapidly, but clearly, his project of escape, which was deferred until the next new moon, when he should be again on duty at the galleys ; but meanwhile, through the instrumentality of this zealous ally, Negáry acquainted the Hungarian ambassador with his project, and obtained from him a sum of money, with which Husza hired a small French brig then about to sail for Venice.

Negáry, having accomplished the loan, passed his time in feverish impatience, seeing no more of Husza, who deemed it necessary to the safety of both, not to be again found in communication with the Christian captive, until duty should once more bring them together.

At length the new moon rose like a diamond crescent in the heavens, and with her came the young Aga at the head of his haughty and overbearing band; and amid the confusion of their arrival, and the departure of those whom they replaced, Husza found an opportunity to whisper to the Count that all was ready.

All was ready! Negáry turned away to hide his gushing tears, and then he looked around him. There he stood, surrounded by obscenity, and filth, and misery, and despair—amid bloodshot eyes that glared with wild revenge which only waited for its time—amid livid lips that quivered with blasphemy and outrage—limbs wasted alike by labour and by famine, to which the chain festered as it clung—squalor, pain, and infamy—all that when thus combined, make of this earth a hell; and then his thoughts fled onward; and he gasped for breath as

he seemed to see the green valleys and lordly mountains of his own Hungary ! And was he, indeed, to traverse them again ? He did not dare to doubt it, lest in that moment of intense and conflicting emotion, his brain should fail him.

An appearance of order was no sooner established among the newly-arrived guard, than Husza approached Negáry, whom he addressed with the greatest harshness ; and on some reply from the Count of which he affected not to approve, he ordered him instantly to be flogged ; suffering himself, however, to be dissuaded from his purpose by the entreaties of the other prisoners ; but although he conceded this point to their humble intercessions, he persisted throughout the day in heaping all imaginable indignities on the uncomplaining captive ; until, when at sunset the prisoners were mustered in the common yard, in order to be locked up for the night, the Aga desired the principal jailor to deliver the Christian Count into his keeping, as the Vēsir had desired to see him two hours before midnight ; when he hinted that the bowstring would probably provide for the unbelieving father of dogs, and relieve them of the pollution of his contact.

With a familiar nod and a grim smile, the jailor obeyed; and a kick and a curse drove the Count forth into the open street; but once arrived there, Husza motioned him onward in silence, and with rapid steps, under cover of the gathering darkness, hurried him to his own house; where clothes and arms lying all ready prepared, the emancipated prisoner was soon equipped in the Moslem garb, in which costume and character he embarked, and ere the lapse of many days, the Noble and his valuable ally were safely landed in Venice. Thence they journeyed by land into Hungary; and arrived at the castle of Negáry, alike unlooked-for, and unannounced. Great were the rejoicings consequent on their appearance; and the Count himself was for a time scarcely less welcome to his family and his retainers, than the brave man by whom he had been liberated.

The return of the noble prisoner to the freedom of his own halls was celebrated by a great festival, held at his principal castle, which was situated at Szutzan, in the county of Thurotz, immediately that he had sufficiently overcome his fatigues to be enabled to preside; and when the banquet was at

its height, and he sat surrounded by all that was great and haughty among the aristocracy of the province, he called to him Stephen Husza ; and in the presence of his noble friends, embraced him affectionately, and placed in his hands a roll of parchment, which transferred to him and his posterity for ever, the sole possession and lordship of the village of Kreplan, and an extensive estate near Szutzan ; and on the morrow the reclaimed Moslem walked in solemn procession to the church, where after *Te Deum* had been chaunted, in gratitude for the redemption of a Christian from the Turkish chain, he recanted his involuntary error ; and humbly and gratefully received the baptism that admitted him once more to the pure altars after which his soul had yearned for years.

Negáry faithfully performed his vow. After a brief period of repose, his foot was again in the stirrup, and his weapon in his hand ; and Husza went forth with him, in humbler guise it is true, but as a beloved brother whom he delighted to succour and to serve ; and so well, and so perseveringly, did he do this, that the descendants of the noble-hearted Husza became of good repute and mark in the

country ; and the family is at the present moment represented by a Vice-Count, whose reputation alike for courage and virtue has caused his name to be honoured wherever it is heard.

CHAPTER II.

As the Baron concluded his recital, he bowed gracefully towards the individual to whom he had just made allusion; and the gallant Vice-Count acknowledged the courtesy with a flushed cheek and a glistening eye.

'The little episode was a pleasant one; for each had something to say which could not fail to be gratifying to the descendant of the brave and faithful Husza; and thus he suddenly found himself an object of increased interest to the fair dames and gallant nobles among whom he sat. His honours were so ancient, and he so well became them, that he felt only pride in this recurrence to the manner in which they were first worn; and his regard for the young Baron who had thus voluntarily become their chronicler, increased in proportion to the delight with which he had listened to the narration.

There is something very ennobling in the pride of

ancestry—It is unselfish, for we glory in that which we have not of ourselves attained ; and it emulates to virtue and great deeds, for we shrink from robbing the halo of our name of one ray of the brightness by which it is surrounded. There is no leaven in the vanity of long descent ; it is untouched and untainted by the struggles and strife of the present—it does not belong to the coil and the fever of the passing day : it is a bequest of the past, which to squander by unworthy actions would be a sin too monstrous for forgiveness. We may scatter gold, for we can hope to redeem it : we may despise place and power, for we are free agents in all that regards our own ambition : but he must be indeed a moral spendthrift who can consent coldly to gamble away by his own vices, the proud name, and noble memory, of a long line of gallant ancestry.

Thus, there is almost virtue in the feeling which sends the warm blood from the heart to the brow, when the records of the past to which you are linked are brought vividly and unexpectedly before you ; and the Vice-Count, as he wrung the hand of the young Baron, felt for the moment as though the

Imperial mandate had added another quartering to his arms.

It was probably in the exuberance of this gratifying emotion that, on resigning the hand of Pratanayer, he said smilingly: "I am half tempted to follow up the recital of my friend with another tale of tried and faithful service; nor am I quite sure that in so doing I shall not incur the risk of carrying off the palm from my own brave ancestor. I am willing, however, to submit his good deeds to the trial; for the tradition which they have brought afresh to my memory merits to be rescued from oblivion. It is indeed an old-world legend, for the fact occurred even before the invasion of the Turks: but virtue and fidelity are for all ages and all time, and will find their way as readily to the heart in the nineteenth century, as when they first taught the barbarian hordes who made the pulses of more civilized nations bleed at every pore, that their real and permanent superiority existed in their moral strength, and in their social obligations."

The offer of the Vice-Count was gratefully accepted. The ladies resumed their respective occupations in anticipatory silence; and save the Count

Nicholas Palffy, who was busily engaged in making a sketch of a worthy but somewhat obtuse old Baroness who had fallen asleep in the middle of the last legend, and who was still slumbering most peacefully in a large elbowed chair of carved oak, with her high cap of rich lace resting against the family crest of the host which surmounted the back of the frame, all were soon intently listening for the commencement of the promised narrative: but his avocation, when discovered, produced a momentary diversion; and the sketch was condemned to make the circuit of the room, and to undergo the comments of the whole party ere order was once more restored, and a hearing obtained for the tradition of the Vice-Count; who having claimed the drawing as his lawful prize, from the fact of the fat old lady being his great aunt, first secured it amid the laughter of the party, and then bowing with mock gravity towards the sleeper, at once began his narrative.

THE CASTELLAN.

In the reign of King Bela IV., surnamed the Jerusalemite from his crusade in the Holy Land,

Hungary was invaded by a powerful nation from the far east, of Mangolic-Tartarian origin. This nation which reached the frontier through Russian-Poland, was under the control of its General-in-Chief, Batus, whose principal leaders were Bocheton, Cadan, Peter Hermens, and some others; and as they swept onward, terror spread before them; and ruin and desolation marked their progress.

They were still hovering on the frontier, when the King issued an edict to compel the presence of every noble with his vassals, in order to oppose the common and formidable enemy on the first signal which they might receive that hostilities had commenced. Among other chieftains this order extended to that of Loewenstein; upon which the good Knight Emmerick instantly prepared to obey the summons of his sovereign; and so efficiently and zealously was he seconded by his retainers, that ere the lapse of many days nothing remained for the brave soldier to do but to take a fond and affectionate farewell of his family, and sally forth to dare the issue of the coming struggle.

Until the hour of his departure came, the Knight had not found time to bestow a thought upon this

parting ; nor was it until he saw his gallant Arab fretting at restraint in the court-yard, and flinging large flakes of foam in the air as it tossed its graceful neck, and strove to escape from the hand of the groom who was endeavouring to moderate its ardour, that he became aware of a sinking of the heart and a sadness of the spirit, which he would willingly have shaken off, but could not.

Next to his country and his honour, the gallant Sir Emmerick loved the Lady Agnes. She had been so young, so beautiful, and so innocent when he made her his bride ; she had become so excellent a wife, and so staid and queenly a matron ; and she had reared his brave boys and his fair and gentle girls in such sweet peace and beautiful obedience, that the household of Loewenstein had grown into a proverb in the province. Sad indeed was the parting, for the Lady Agnes well knew the half-savage and barbarous nature of the enemies against whom her lord was about to contend ; and the most gloomy forebodings pressed upon her spirit.

“ Had one of our dear boys been only old enough to have fought beside thee, my Emmerick ;” she said fondly, as she stood with her arm about his

neck, and her head pillowed upon his shoulder ; “ methinks I should not have grieved so much at thy departure ; for the saints would have loved so fair a sight, and have protected thee for thy child’s sake, and for mine. But thou goest forth alone against these barbarians, and I am loth to let thee quit me.”

“ Nay, madam, and my good mistress”—interposed a hoarse voice at her elbow ; and turning suddenly towards it, the Lady Agnes beheld at her side the stalwart and lofty form of Andrew Budiak, the Castellan of Loewenstein, one of the most tried and faithful of her husband’s followers ; a man who although past his prime, was still as bold in the battle-field as he was true in the castle-hall ; and who had won his present post by long years of fidelity and service. Budiak was looked upon with reverence by all the household, and with trust and favour by the Knight and his fair wife ; while to the happy boys who grew up in beauty beneath his eye, he was at once a playmate, a protector, and a friend.

“ Nay, madam, and my good mistress ;” said the deep voice of the Castellan ; “ that may still be

as it pleases my lord, for there is no need that one like he should go forth without a trusty heart at his stirrup. I am weary of the dull safety of Loewenstein; it chafes my hasty and restless spirit; and I humbly pray him to reclaim the honours of the post I have so long held, and to let me go with him against these Tartar fiends."

"And the Lady Agnes—and her children"—said the Knight, looking affectionately but upbraidingly on his follower: "Who is to protect them while I am absent, if my faithful Budiak forsake them also?"

"Every vassal who has eaten of his lord's bread, and trod the halls of Loewenstein;" replied the Castellan: "or he were unworthy the name of man; nor do I believe that there breathes one within these walls to-day, who would betray so holy and so dear a trust."

"He says well, my noble Emmerick;" whispered the lady: "for me there is no risk. Let him bear thee company; I shall deem thee far safer if our good Budiak be near thee; and in the same orisons which I make to heaven for thee, I will murmur his name also."

The prayer of the Lady Agnes was complied with; and when the gallant troop of the Lord of Loewenstein swept across the drawbridge on their way to join the army, Andrew Budiak rode at their head beside his master, and a new Castellan held authority in the fortress.

All the chieftains had not, however, armed with the same promptitude as this brave knight, for the incursions of the Mongolic tribes had become so frequent, and were often so apparently aimless—unless indeed the constant harass which they kept up could be considered as an adequate object—that the exertion of one powerful noble had generally sufficed to repulse them; and the present danger did not, consequently, impress the minds of the nation at large as it might otherwise have done. The effect of this false security was necessarily to induce a want of energy to resist it; and whether or not it had been contemplated by the invaders that such would be the case, it is certain that a great portion of the country was ravaged and laid waste, before the royal army, encamped under the walls of Buda, was yet sufficiently strong to be able to encounter the enemy.

At length, however, some reinforcements having arrived, it was resolved to make the attempt : the tents were struck ; the whole mass set in motion ; and after a few days' march the royal troops fell in with the vanguard of the Tartars ; but as these were indifferently armed, and unprepared at the moment for such a rencontre, they were easily overpowered and taken. This success serving as a good omen, the Hungarian army quickened its movements ; and with as little delay as was compatible with the transport of a large body of men through so wild and difficult a country, it arrived on the bank of the river Lago, where Batus had encamped the whole of his forces.

Unfortunately for the Hungarians, this wild but singularly-endowed chief was well prepared to receive them ; and the battle which immediately ensued proved most disastrous in its results to the lords of the soil ; for in that fight the flower of the native nobility fell on all sides, the country was laid open to the invaders, and the King himself narrowly escaped with life, after having encountered both danger and suffering, and found a wretched refuge in the Dalmatian islands, where he was

compelled to become an eye-witness of horrors which threatened the irretrievable ruin of the kingdom, and which he could neither terminate nor controul.

Never was a battle more fatal than that which made the river-tide of the Lago run red with the blood of both Christian and Infidel. The Tartarian troops suffered severely, and their slain cumbered the green sward; but Hungary had to weep not only her bravest but her noblest. High heads were bowed that day, and high hearts stilled for ever—there was scarcely a hearth throughout the land beside which one seat was not made vacant. Death had a rich harvest! But, alas! the evil ended not here, for they who fell were comparatively blessed; their cares were over; and when the broad sun went down after the fight, it gilded with its goodliest beams the graves of those who slept beneath them. The pale dawn rose, and the mountain vapours unwound their clammy wreaths from peak and pinnacle, as the radiant beam came on; but with the light and the warmth of day came also the wild victors among the dying and the dead, to plunder those whose task was ended, and

to secure the wounded, who might hereafter be ransomed.

Of the latter number were the Knight of Loewenstein and his faithful Budiak, who had fought and fallen together; and who, having partially recovered consciousness, and given unequivocal signs of life, were lifted from the earth, conveyed into the Tartar camp, and assigned by lot to the Chief Cadan.

A few days of rest were reluctantly ceded to them, for their wounds were numerous and severe; but their savage master had no sooner ascertained that no actual risk of their dying by the way still existed, than they were chained together, and with a score of other unfortunates, also linked two and two, and attached by the centre of their fetters to the stirrup of a Tartar horseman, bearing a long and pliant lance in his hand, a bow slung at his saddle-bow, and a quiver of arrows at his back, they were dragged or driven onward, and not unfrequently impelled by blows, towards the home of their captor. This they only gained after many days and nights of agony and struggle beneath which some of their comrades sank, and were left by the

road-side where they fell, to become the prey of obscene birds, and the banquet of the jackal and the wolf; with curses for their requiem, and Heaven for their avenger!

The most sanguine spirit among the miserable little band had not ventured to nourish one hope of escape by the way, for the very nature of the arms carried by their captors rendered evasion impossible, even had the prisoners themselves possessed physical strength to attempt it; and when at length their wretched journey ended, they felt that they were doomed men; for the leisure produced by cessation from toil only sufficed to give them a more perfect and despairing sense of their hopeless position.

The first intelligence which reached the Castle of Loewenstein after the battle, filled the heart of the Lady Agnes with terror and anxiety; and she immediately dispatched a trusty vassal, on whose ability and zeal she could depend, to ascertain the fate of her lord. For a long weary month she received no tidings; but when her messenger did indeed return, he came to the halls of his master only too soon, for he brought with him the appalling tidings, that both the Knight and his follower

had fallen beneath the Tartar arrows, in the very thickest of the fight.

It were vain to attempt to depict the agony of the widowed mother, as she listened to the fatal tale. "Dead!" she exclaimed wildly: "What! the father of my boys? The Lord of Loewenstein, who hath ever made his foemen lick the dust, and scattered terror before him as he went? It cannot be! You would mock me, because I am here alone, and that he is not by to comfort me——" And then she wept, and none sought to controul her tears, for they knew that without this kindly dew such grief might craze her brain; but they brought her children to her, and placed her last-born on her knee; and then they left her for awhile in her sorrow, for they felt that it was too sacred to look upon at such a moment.

They judged well and wisely, for after the lapse of two or three hours, the Lady Agnes came forth; and with all her little ones about her, her infant nestling upon her heart, and her elder boy clinging to her hand, she moved to the upper end of the hall.

"Shall we not bid the dead rest?" she asked in a low hollow tone: "And how know we whether

an orison hath been said over them? Summon all within the ramparts of the castle; ay, even those who watch, and let us to the chapel—we have a holy duty to perform—see that it be done speedily.”

And it was done. At midnight the requiem of the departed was solemnly chaunted by torchlight, and before the altar knelt the Lady and her children, covered with sable draperies, and mingling with the holy words of worship the choking sobs of human suffering; while from the body of the chapel, where clustered the vassals and men-at-arms, the low sigh of manly grief might be heard at intervals, as the solemn strain rose and fell; for all had loved the gallant Lord of Loewenstein, and thus all mourned for him.

Emmerick, meanwhile, was wasting his days in toil, and suffering, and tears. Occasionally he heard tidings of his country, but they were always sad ones, gathered from the fresh prisoners who were from time to time brought in: of his home no intelligence had ever reached him; and bitter indeed were the visions which he conjured up of what might have befallen his wife and his little ones amid the devastation of his devoted and unhappy

land ; nor could even his faithful Budiak talk to him of hope, or bid him believe that his home had been respected. All was despair about them : the heavy chain to which they were attached was corroding and sapping their life-blood ; they were worn down with labour, squalid in their rags, and haggard from want of food. What had they to hope ?

Things were in this state when the Tartar general once more returned from an invading expedition rich with booty, and having made so many prisoners as greatly to diminish the amount of labour hitherto enforced upon each individual captive ; and thus, where previously a momentary cessation from toil had been visited with the lash, it was now not only permitted, but frequently enjoined, where the bodily weakness of the labourer rendered such indulgence necessary ; and even from among the wasted slaves of Cadan many a thanksgiving went up to Heaven for so blessed and unlooked-for a relaxation of torture.

It chanced that one evening, overcome by exertion under a burning sun, the Lord of Loewenstein and his companion sank down side by side, upon

their bed of leaves, within the den which had been assigned to them, when Budiak, in the act of turning away his head from his master that he might not seem to be watching his misery, caught sight of an axe which had been accidentally left in their cell by one of the hired labourers employed in erecting sheds for the newly-arrived captives, who were so numerous as to require additional places of shelter ; and without even asking himself a question as to its probable utility, or forming any plan in which it might avail, he hastily concealed it within his garments. As he did so, a new hope, strong and resistless, sprang up within him ; although he could shape it into no tangible form or likeness, nor torture his invention into any scheme of deliverance which was not only too vague but even too impossible for accomplishment.

The night wore on ; the watch had been set ; each prisoner had answered as his name had been challenged by the captain of the guard ; and the deep slumber of over-wrought strength—that sleep which is without rest, and almost without blessing—had fallen upon the miserable band, when Budiak revealed to the Knight the secret of his newly-

acquired treasure. Their first impulse was spontaneous: chained as they were together, all escape was impossible; but this strong instrument, which seemed to have been placed in their hands by Providence, would sever those galling fetters, and set them free. Accordingly, with great caution, and muffling the sound of the iron links with the folds of their coarse garments, the two captives commenced their attempt; but every effort proved fruitless: the ponderous chain was too substantial to be so severed: and after they had alternately exhausted their feeble remain of strength in the vain endeavour, they desisted in despair, and as they did so, each turned aside to weep.

“It avails not;” at length exclaimed the Knight; “we are fated to die like felons, and we must submit—there is no hope—would that there were also no memory. What a curse has the past become to me! I grow old as I call it back. Budiak, I love you—I mourn for you—I cannot forget that it is for me that you are here, when you might have been free, and honoured, and happy—Happy! how happy? for you might have been at this moment breathing the same air as my wife—my Agnes—

sporting with her children—treading the halls of Loewenstein in freedom ; and now what are you ?”

“ Your own poor servant, my good Lord ;” was the reply, as the faithful follower turned painfully upon his rugged bed, and raised the hand of his chieftain to his lips, which were moistened by the blood-drops that his late struggle to rend the chain had collected on his maimed and smarting fingers ; “ Your own poor servant, suffering for you and with you, and thus far happier than if he were himself the Lord of Loewenstein ! Would you think of *me* when the chain is rusting into your own flesh ?”

“ Budiak ;” said the noble prisoner, and as he spoke he flung his arms, fettered as they were, about his follower, until the jealous chain seemed to have blended them into one ; “ I thank you from my soul, for I believe you ; but even your affection cannot blot out the memory of the past—the thought of what *may be* even in the present. My angel wife ! Should dishonour—should insult come to *her*—but I dare not think ! Budiak, our country is one hecatomb—our homes are no longer sacred—our wives, our sisters, our daughters, may be the spoil of the savage—the Tartar ! I tell you once

again I dare not think, for my brain whirls, and my veins run fire ; and I feel as though you would be ere long linked to a maniac, who, in the forgetfulness of all that once made life a hallowed and a holy thing, may turn and rend you."

" My honoured Lord——" interposed the Castellan.

" Mock me not:" groaned out the Knight ; " What am I that thou shouldst play with me, and give me gentle names, such as women love to lavish on their suitors ? Rather let me die—die here—*here* on this pile of mouldering corruption—on these foul leaves that we have been in mercy suffered to collect. Let me die ! What am I that any should call me Lord ? Have I not become a by-word and a mockery ? But I care not for myself—it is for her—for Agnes. Oh ! could I only know that she was free from terror and from taint——"

" You *shall* know it, my noble Lord ;" once more interposed Budiak ; " Despair not ; nature sometimes shrinks for a time, but she redeems herself at last ; I can support my own misery, for I am alone in the world ; glory has been my mistress, and I have known no other ; I am the child and the vo-

tary of fortune, and though the chances have now turned against me, I have no right to rebuke my fate; for, thanks to you, my brave and honoured master, I have in my time dealt far heavier blows than I have yet received. With you it is otherwise; you were born to greatness, and you have lost your birthright, but it must be redeemed."

"Alas! there is no hope"—murmured the Knight; as he buried his face in his hands.

He was aroused by a heavy blow. Not one which had fallen upon a hard and resisting substance, but which produced a crashing and smothered sound, that, although he knew not why, thrilled to the very core of his heart.

"What have you done, Budiak?" he asked hurriedly.

"My Lord! my benefactor!" gasped out the voice of his follower; "There was but the accursed Tartar chain between you and freedom, and we could not burst it. It holds you here no longer: go—rejoin your wife, and be happy. Tell her——"

As he paused in agony, and raised his hand to dash the sweat-drops from his brow, the Knight bent towards him to discover the secret of his terrible

emotion, when with a groan of misery he sank back in his turn, exclaiming:

“Tell me that I dream—I dare not—will not believe that you have done this—Budiak! tell me that I am under the influence of some foul fiend, who mocks me with a deed of horror.”

“Calm yourself, my Lord, and think of flight:” replied the heroic vassal; and as he spoke, he raised himself, with a violent effort, and wrenched away from the fetter by which it had been so long encircled, the leg which he had hewn from his body in order to accomplish the escape of his master: “Let me fling off this useless limb, which never served me so well as it has done this day. And now be wary, my good lord, and you are free; for our Infidel captors have trusted largely to the chain, and speed and silence will almost ensure success.”

“Never!” said Emmerick, as he threw his arms about the devoted man; “I will never leave you here alone—maimed for my sake—a prey to the lash; or perhaps—Oh, Mary Mother, avert it! to die without one friendly voice to murmur peace in your last moments.”

“Will you then condemn me to feel that I have made this sacrifice in vain?” asked Budiak. “Will you compel me to see my own sufferings aggravated by your participation in them, without having the power to alleviate a single pang? Have you forgotten that if you are found here at dawn we shall both be the victims of an act for which I alone should be responsible? You will not—cannot bid me suffer this. Come, come, my Lord, arouse yourself and depart; and let my bodily sufferings be forgotten in the intense yearning with which I shall follow you in thought upon your homeward path.”

“I will not leave you thus”—persisted the Knight.

“Nay then—hear the truth:” and once more the gallant Castellan raised himself upon his arm, and struggled against the faintness which was rapidly overcoming his strength; “even now I feel that I am dying—my heart flutters awhile like a newly-caged bird, and then stands still; and the blood that is draining my veins drops cold and thick, as though little more remained to shed. Farewell; bid my lady say an orison for my soul—from her lips it

will bring me peace—and the brave boys—and my poor country—I never loved them half so well as now !”

The last words were scarcely gasped out when the sufferer fell back heavily upon the earth, cold, rigid, and unconscious ; nor did the Knight for an instant doubt that the spirit of the stout soldier had fled for ever. For a few moments he remained holding the body in a close embrace, and bedewing the pale calm face with those tears which are wrung from the spirit of manhood at a price far more bitter than blood ; but gradually thoughts of his wife, his home, his children, and his country—of all that he had loved and lost—grew thick and fast upon him. He might yet hold his place among his fellow-men ; yet revenge himself upon the tyrants who had made beasts of burthen of some of the best blood of Hungary ; who had—curses on them !—driven his bravest follower to the frightful act of self-immolation, at whose very idea his soul sickened and his pulses shook ; who was now dead—dead in his arms—and *for him !* And then came the thirst for vengeance. Yes, Budiak should be revenged. He must not have died a death of blood in vain ; and as the Knight

arrived at this resolve, he carefully laid the body of his unhappy follower back upon its rude resting-place ; and after a last embrace and a murmured prayer, hastily enveloped the hated chain in the folds of the coarse serge in which he was habited, and stole from the shed.

Budiak had argued rightly. The security of the ponderous chains with which they encumbered their prisoners had been so long unimpeachable, that the Tartar guard kept but careless watch over their charge ; and accordingly the Knight hastened on under cover of the darkness, until the return of dawn warned him to be more cautious ; when availing himself of the vicinity of a thick wood, he ascended a leafy tree, and having established himself securely among the branches, overcome with anxiety and fatigue he fell into a deep and heavy sleep, from which hunger at length awoke him.

Having carefully reconnoitred the neighbourhood, and ascertained that nothing human was to be seen in its vicinity, he descended from the friendly shelter, and appeased the craving by which he was tormented with the fruits and berries that he found growing about him ; and then, having poured out his spirit

in prayer and thanksgiving to the Great Being who had so far protected him, he resumed his journey, of which the difficulty was much enhanced by the weight of the ponderous chain that he was compelled to drag along with him; and which to him appeared still more heavy from its frightful associations.

Difficulty, toil, and hardship were the daily heritage of the Knight as he wandered on; nor was it until after many days that he succeeded in finding a peasant whose pity overcame his terror of discovery, and who consented to rid the poor fugitive Christian slave of the fetters which so painfully impeded his progress. As they fell to the ground, Emmerick sank upon his knees—Now he was indeed free! And with the name of his wife upon his lips, and the memory of Budiak in his heart, he went on his way rejoicing, with liberated limbs and renovated hope.

At length, wearied and wayworn, he reached a spot whence he could look upon his home; but even as he stood gazing upward on its tall towers bathed in light, and its dark frowning battlements, that formed a warlike and threaten-

ing coronal to the steep rock which they surmounted, a solemn strain of music swept downward to the valley, like a requiem for the dead; and a cold chill gathered about the heart of the wanderer, as he asked of a peasant who stood beside him, and who had been his guide through the difficult passes of the mountain, why that mournful strain was pealing out.

“Stranger:” was the reply; “had you been an inhabitant of our province you would have known that two years since this very day, the brave Lord of Loewenstein, on whose castle you are now looking, fell in fight against the Tartars; and his lady, who has never yet cast aside her mourning weeds, is celebrating his annual requiem, surrounded by all his vassals and retainers. Well may they weep for him, for few have ever mourned a better master!”

“Why are you not among them, if you mourn his fate?” asked the Knight.

“It was this errand which brought me into your path:” replied the serf; “I am bound for the castle even now; and, thanks be to the saints, I shall not arrive too late.”

“ I will be your companion ;” said Emmerick :
“ the prayers of the soldier and the wayfarer will
be welcome.”

“ As you will :” was the reply ; and, in another
moment, they were breasting the steep ascent to
Loewenstein ; each too much absorbed in his own
reflections to weary his comrade with words ; nor
did the Knight resent the blunt fellowship of his
guide, for two years of famine and wretchedness had
so altered him that he was as one disguised, whom
none might recognise ; and thus he approached his
own halls, in hopefulness of spirit, but the mere
shadow of his former self, clad in rags, and wasted
by famine.

When they reached the chapel they found it
hung with sable drapery, and lighted by torches ;
and, even as she had stood before the altar in the
first days of her imaginary widowhood, so stood the
Lady Agnes now, covered from head to foot in a
thick black veil, and surrounded by her children ;
her meek eyes raised to heaven, and her cheek pale
from vigils and regret.

As he looked upon her the Knight could scarcely
refrain from clasping her to his heart, and kissing

away the tears which were falling fast into her bosom; but the solemn service had commenced, and he felt that he was once more kneeling before the altar of his faith, and that his first emotions of gratitude and love were due to Heaven; but so strongly was he moved as the rites proceeded, that many about him looked anxiously and curiously on the strange man who had come among them at such a moment, no one knew whence, to weep as they wept, and to mingle his grief with theirs.

When the service terminated, the Lady Agnes proceeded from the chapel to the great gate of the castle, to distribute alms to all such as might be there to receive them; and no hands save her own and those of her fair children, were suffered to aid in the distribution of the food, which as each received it, was repaid by a prayer for the dead.

In his turn Emmerick approached the sad and gentle lady; but ere he did so, he drew from his bosom and displayed above his tattered vest, a small picture of the Virgin, suspended about his neck by a chain of her own hair, which she had hung there years before on one of his departures

for battle; and which, from its utter want of intrinsic value, his captors had suffered him to retain.

The ornament caught the eye of Geysa, his elder and favourite son; and the boy drew to it the attention of his mother by exclaiming: "Serve this poor pilgrim, I beseech you, mother, for he seems faint from toil and want; and he must surely be a good man, for see, even amid his rags he has preserved a picture of Our Lady, which he might have sold for food."

Thus urged, the Lady Agnes drew near the mendicant, and as her eyes fell upon the relique, she at once recognised her own gift; but for awhile she stood speechlessly gazing upon the gaunt and squalid figure before her; and then, throwing back her veil, she bent down with parted lips and distended eye-balls, like one paralyzed by a hideous dream, and gasped out, "Speak! Whence are you? Speak!"

"Agnes!" murmured a well-known voice; and, in the next instant Emmerick once more held his beloved wife in his arms.

Great was the emotion of all present, when, after having recovered partially from his fatigues, the

Knight told the tale of his sufferings and captivity ; but when he related the noble act of his devoted Castellan, sobs and tears broke out on all sides, and even the strong men wept.

Solemn masses were performed for the repose of his soul, and alms were distributed in his honour ; while no day passed in which the Lady Agnes and her children did not blend the name of the heroic Budiak with that of his recovered lord.

To return, however, to that devoted servant. The swoon, for such it was into which he had fallen, and which had been induced by loss of blood, and by the almost superhuman efforts that he had made to conceal the extent of his suffering from his master, was of long endurance ; and effectually checked the hemorrhage which was fast draining away his life. In this state he was found in the morning by the guard, who, alarmed at the non-appearance of the Knight and himself at their scanty meal, hastened in search of them.

Their astonishment at the spectacle which awaited them in the narrow cell, may be imagined ; and when at the command of Cadan, who had been instantly informed of the circumstance of Emmerick's

disappearance, and the maimed condition of his companion, means were used to restore Budiak to consciousness, which proved ultimately successful, and that he learned from the lips of the agonized sufferer the history of the past night, his rage became for a time ungovernable.

“Thou shalt die the death of a dog, vile slave!” exclaimed the chief; “without help, and without pity.”

“I care not;” was the reply: “I have saved my master.”

“And he has left thee here to perish:” sneered the Tartar General.

“He thought me dead;” said Budiak firmly: “and Our Lady be thanked! he is now free, and will be ere long in his own halls, and in the arms of his wife.”

“Only tell me that thou hast repented the rash deed, and that were it yet to do thou wouldst refuse”—urged the astonished Cadan.

“I may not pass away with a lie upon my lips:” said the Castellan; “I would lop every limb save that which did the holy work, could I by the sacrifice ensure to him the happiness of a life of freedom

and success. And now let me die; I have nothing to regret, or to excuse; and I would fain pray for my chief and for my country, while I have yet breath to do it."

The Tartar General turned aside in deep emotion. In the half-savage devotion and self-sacrifice of the Hungarian vassal there was a haughty carelessness of suffering, and even of life, which he could at once appreciate and admire.

"He must not perish thus:" he said to his astonished attendants; and then stooping towards the Castellan, he added gently; "Christian, thou hast conquered. The sun rests to-day upon my weapon, but its beam may glance off in some hour of peril, when such love as thine may be beyond all price. Strive against thy weakness, and live. Care and rest may yet restore thee; and I swear that for the sake of the noble lesson thou hast taught to my own followers, thou shalt no sooner be able to keep the saddle than I will give thee gold, and arms, and such a steed as it shall become a Tartar chieftain himself to cross; and send thee under a safe escort to thine own people and thine own land, that the proud Hungarians may

learn that Cadan also can respect the virtue of fidelity."

In deep gratitude and amazement the overjoyed Budiak endeavoured, maimed and tortured as he was, to cast himself at the feet of his generous captor; but as he ceased speaking, the Tartar left the cell.

The thought of home and freedom, combined with the care of those around him, who fulfilled to the letter the instructions of their Chief, soon restored the Castellan to some degree of strength; and he no sooner believed himself able to encounter the fatigue of the undertaking, than he obtained permission to set forth upon his journey. Every promise which had been made to him was strictly fulfilled. A purse of gold; a richly inlaid sword and yataghan; and a noble Arabian, upon which from the moment when he bestrode it he could in fancy see the son of his lord mounted for his first fight, were delivered to him as the parting present of Cadan; who, however, refused to receive either his thanks or his farewell; and thus, without another sight of that redoubtable leader, he departed from the scene of his captivity.

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The nature of his wound, and the extreme exhaustion of his frame, necessarily rendered his progress tedious and uncertain, while his mind was constantly tortured with apprehensions for his master, of whose safety he had no surety until he should find him at his own hearth.

At length the blessed moment came ; and joyful was the welcome with which for the second time the inhabitants of Loewenstein received, as if from the grave, one whom they had long mourned as lost to them for ever. He came to them crippled and wasted, it is true ; but he was again among those who were to him dearer than limbs or life ; and he felt himself pressed to the heart of his grateful master, and greeted by the name of “ brother ;” and the happy tears of the Lady Agnes were on his hand, and the kisses of her children upon his lips, and all around him was care and congratulation.

When the young Lord Geysa of Loewenstein went forth for the first time to battle beside his gallant father, he wore in his girdle a costly yataghan of Eastern fashion and fabric ; and was lifted into his saddle by the Baron Andrew Budiak, whose broad lands had been given to him and to

his heirs for ever by the Lord of Loewenstein; and as he withdrew the bridle of his beautiful Arabian from the hands of a groom, a stalwart warrior armed cap-à-pie, but shorn of a leg, rode to his side, upon whose shield was emblazoned a right chivalrous coat of arms granted to him with his title by the Emperor, of which the crest was a lion, and which bore on the second field a severed leg encircled by a chain.

It were almost needless to say how brave a line descended from this bold Baron; but the national archives show that in 1809 his descendants did goodly service to their country, and perilled life and limb fearlessly in the service of their Sovereign.

CHAPTER III.

THE narration of the Vice-Count had beguiled many of his fairest listeners of their tears; for there are few things which speak more directly to the heart of woman than individual heroism. Her natural shrinking from violence and danger, and that consciousness of her own weakness and dependence which constitutes in the eyes of most of the opposite sex her loveliest charm, are the very attributes which enable her to appreciate and to honour courage in those to whom she looks for safety and support.

In the tradition of the Vice-Count there was consequently much to interest the ladies of the party; and as even the fat old Baroness had awakened before the tale was more than half told, the gallant descendant of Husza could boast as attentive an auditory as ever encouraged a chronicler.

“I confess myself vanquished;” smiled the Baron Pratnayér, when the comments of the party were exhausted; “for the tale which we have just heard proves indeed that truth is sometimes stranger than

fiction; while it is equally certain that it is at *all* times infinitely more interesting."

"I have only one objection to offer;" said Pálffy; "and that is, that hitherto the ladies have played a very subordinate part in these our reminiscences. I vote therefore that the next tale which is told, and which, by-the-by, if of tolerable length will occupy the remainder of the evening, may be a love-story. It is a reproach upon our Hungarian chivalry to have chronicled only episodes of masculine prowess."

"The word prowess reminds me of an ancestress of my own;" said the Baron Wesselény, a tall, dark, handsome Transylvanian, who was one of the party; "and if I should be fated in my turn to figure as a domestic historian, I will give you the whole chronicle of her courtship."

"Show your courage, and volunteer the tale;" laughed Pálffy, who was busily engaged in tangling the skeins of party-coloured silk with which his affianced bride was creating mysterious groups upon the canvas of her embroidery frame; "Some one had really better exert himself to prove that the brave knights of old had fair dames to appreciate

their valour, and to emulate their virtues; or our national character will suffer, and our gallantry be at a sad discount."

"There is assuredly no reason why we should shrink from mention of our countrywomen;" said the host; "for more beauty does not exist in any land than in Hungary; and we ought to be satisfied with our fate, even amid all its drawbacks, when we reflect on the compensation which has thus been made to us. Nor is it alone at our own hearths that we feel this, for no foreigner fails to celebrate the loveliness of the Magyar maidens."

"By St. Stephen!" exclaimed Pálffy, seizing a guitar which lay upon a sofa near him: "the worthy Baron is right; and while Wesselény collects his memories, I will sing you a ballad written by a young English lady who was lately among us, in honour of the bright eyes of the fair Countess Rosa Szápáry. It was done into Hungarian by a man whom we all know, and who is destined at no distant day to take a high place among European poets; and it fell so smoothly into one of our national melodies that I have appropriated it; and will now give you an opportunity of acknowledging

that justice has been done to one of the loveliest of our aristocracy." And, without further preface, he swept the strings, and commenced his song.

"Lovely lady! in thine eyes
Dwells the light of paradise;
And before thy glowing lips
Roses die of an eclipse;
While upon thy radiant brow
Grace sits throned in living snow.

"'Mid the mazes of thy hair
Cupids wanton here and there,
And each ringlet seen apart
Is a cage to hold a heart;
Oh, how very sweet to be
Bless'd with such captivity!

"All the Graces flew to earth
To receive thee at thy birth;
Fortune shed her mantle o'er thee,
Time laid the proud past before thee,
And when Beauty claimed thee wholly,
Virtue made the compact holy!"

The most earnest of the party in his thanks to Nicholas Pálffy, if we except the deep eyes of his mistress, was one of the relatives of the graceful Countess who had inspired the verses, and who pledged himself to repay them by a tradition of his race on the following evening, should the frost still continue; after which Wesselény, having announced

that his own legend was prepared, forthwith began its recital.

WOOING A BRIDE.

The Thirty Years' War was raging in all its horrors in Germany; sorrow and suffering were loud on every side; and the Swedes, resolute to revenge the death of their great monarch, were perpetrating reckless cruelties whose effects endured for years. The people, abandoned to the fluctuations of conflicting ideas and doctrines, and swayed hither and thither by a power over which they had no control, and with which it was impossible to contend, had little connexion with their rulers; who, absorbed in the vortex of the war, sometimes conquerors and sometimes conquered, recognised no right but might, and no authority but that of brute strength, and unconquerable will.

To complete the national dismemberment, Ferdinand II. died, bequeathing to his elder son an inheritance encroached upon on all sides, and threatened with still further violence; nor would it indeed have been possible for him to have preserved the empire in this extremity, had not the religious

dissension by which Hungary had been so rudely shaken, been just then appeased ; and a peace with considerable difficulty concluded with the Ottoman Porte.

The fire, however, although it blazed less fiercely, still smouldered amid its ashes. Some concessions had been made to the Hungarian Protestants, but they were still far from being satisfied with their position ; and claimed certain privileges upon which they insisted the more strenuously that their brethren in Germany had succeeded in obtaining them. The greater the progress made by their faith in Germany the more vehement became their own discontent ; and it was soon evident to all who were conversant with the state of the country that a serious crisis was at hand.

The Prince George Rakóty had, immediately after the death of Bethlen, induced the States to elect him to the throne of Transylvania ; and although he forbore all participation in the feuds and factions which were growing up around him, he looked with satisfaction upon their increasing virulence ; for he felt that his own cause must be strengthened, and his still precarious position as-

sured, by a state of things which would materially paralyze the power of the Emperor. He calculated correctly that should it come to an open breach between the protestant party and the sovereign, his aid would be immediately required ; and that even if he should fail to enforce the claim of his predecessor to the crown of Hungary, he should at least extend his territories, and increase his power.

With consummate diplomacy he remained perfectly passive, not even permitting himself to express his sentiments ; and apparently taking no interest whatever in the partial outbreaks, by participating in which he would only have injured the great design that he had in view ; and which, he well knew, would require above all things the co-operation of powerful allies.

The death of the Turkish Sultan Amurath (1639), with whom negociations had already commenced, was productive of considerable delay ; his brother and successor, Ibrahim, being fully occupied in securing himself on the throne, and thus having neither time, wish, nor power to undertake any foreign enterprise : but at length a treaty was

concluded with this sovereign; and thus, with the advancing and hostile Swedes ever menacing further violence; and in the midst of a country torn with faction; troops were levied, ammunition collected, and negotiations commenced, not only with the authorities of several large cities, but also with the owners of many important castles and fortresses; and all things prepared for a great and decisive struggle.

In the year 1644 Rakótyz publicly proclaimed himself the Champion of the oppressed Protestants, and the mediator between them and the Emperor; declaring at the same time that the office had been forced upon him, and that he had accepted it only by universal request; and concluding his address by transmitting a proposal of accommodation to Ferdinand, which was instantly rejected.

Scarcely had the royal negative reached Transylvania, when the Prince published his declaration of war; announcing himself as Protector of the Faith, and inviting all sincere Protestants to join his banner, and to unite in a general effort to secure their rights, or rather to compel them; while he gave additional zest to his appeal by immediately making

a descent into Hungary at the head of twenty-two thousand men, at a moment when the Emperor, fully occupied by the distracted state of Germany, could detach only a small force to oppose him, under the command of Valentine Nicholas Esterházy, than whom a braver soldier never drew sword; but who had the mortification of seeing his opponents make themselves masters of Tokay, Kashaw, Eperies, Leutshau, Neusohl, Shemnitz, and several other fortified towns and castles, without his possessing the means of impeding their victorious progress, fettered as he was for want of both men and ammunition.

The fortress of Muranzi, the most important stronghold, not only of the Province of Gömör, but it may almost be said of the whole of Upper Hungary, was held by Maria Szétzi, the widow of Stephen Bethlen; and had opened its gates to the troops of Rakótzý, which enabled them to extend themselves in every direction over the adjacent country, and to attract to their ranks all the malcontents who might otherwise have remained neuter, or joined the Imperial army; with whom, rendered daring by impunity, they spread terror almost to the very gates of Presburg.

But ere long the Emperor, witnessing with some dismay the increasing importance of the insurgent army, marched a strong reinforcement into Hungary, with whose assistance the Palatine was enabled to check the further advances of Rakótzý's troops; while a second force, under the command of the Imperial General Buckheim, by which he was ably supported, tended greatly to change the aspect of the Prince's fortunes.

Several unsuccessful battles followed each other in rapid succession; and their result was to compel the Transylvanian leader to evacuate an immense tract of land of which he had recently made himself master, and to restore it to the Imperial authority; but the strength of the garrisons which he had thrown into every fortified place along the whole extent of the contested country, enabled his party to retain possession of these important points, despite the efforts made by the Imperialists to recover them.

Among the rest was Muranzy; to which, knowing its excessive importance, the insurgent general had paid such particular attention, as to garrison it with the *élite* of his army: but he had even more

confidence in the Châtelaine than in his own precautionary measures ; nor did he seek for a moment to dissuade her from her resolve when she informed him that although she had received himself and his troops into the fortress, it was in honour and support of a cause which was also her own ; and that while life lasted she would never resign the command of her own castle.

This heroic lady was the elder daughter of Count George Szétzi, one of the noblest spirits of his time ; and at the period of our tale she was the sole representative of the family, and seemed to have inherited all their brave and lofty qualities. Of great personal beauty, and strong powers of mind, she had been from her earliest youth the theme of wonder and the object of universal admiration. But the voice of flattery and the accents of passion were alike *caviare* to the daughter of Count Szétzi ; and she was only in the first bloom of youth when she proved the indomitable nature of the spirit which was within her, by boldly resisting the commands of her father to become the wife of a noble whom she despised.

Szétzi, enraged at her opposition—the opposition

of a mere girl, to whom he deemed that his lightest word should have been a law—threatened her with disinheritance, coupled with his everlasting displeasure. “To the first I will patiently submit:” said the Lady Mary calmly; “your wealth is to you what my hand is to me—it is your own to give or to withhold; and what you have done with the possessions which you inherited from your ancestors I will do with my person; I will maintain even to the death my right over that which is mine beyond appeal. For your displeasure—the subject of your keenest and most painful threat—I will bow beneath it until you are convinced that it was causeless; and trust me, that day will yet come!”

Still more exasperated than before, the Count commanded his daughter to her chamber, where he turned the key upon her, and left her to her reflections, and the companionship of sundry old worm-eaten chronicles, which she had disinterred from among the litter of the armoury, and in which she found most congenial communion. They were for the most part rude records of rare passages of arms; traditions of pilgrimages to the Holy Land, when pilgrims went thither sword in hand, and lance in

rest ; and such like memorials of the olden times when war was the one great business of the world.

Her imprisonment produced no concession ; for she loved the leisure which had thus enabled her to dive deep, and to think long on these, her favourite studies ; and when at the termination of several weeks the Count once more summoned her to his presence, expecting to find her spirit cowed, and to meet nothing but submission, and saw that far from such being the case, she was only more firm and more resolute than at first, he discovered that he had mistaken the method of securing her obedience : and forthwith, feigning to repent his harshness, he addressed to her arguments which appealed to her heart rather than to her reason. He besought, he implored, he called her by the gentlest names in his somewhat scant vocabulary of tenderness ; he talked to her of her dead mother ; of her buried sisters ; he reminded her that she was his last hope on earth ; and finally he so overwrought his own nature by the efforts which he made to subdue hers, that the tears fell on his time-stained cheek ; and at that sight all the woman gushed from the soul of his daughter, and flinging herself into his arms

she bade him be comforted, for that she would do all he wished.

A moment after, and repugnance swelled at her heart until her veins seemed to run ice; but her word was pledged, and she would rather have submitted her right hand to the stroke of a sabre than forfeited her faith. And she wedded thus—wedded with reluctance and disgust, a man who had sought her for her wealth, and whose coward spirit quailed before the strong mind and the haughty nature of his scornful bride, whose every glance was a reproach, and whose every word was a command; but her star was propitious, for ere the year had waned she was a widow; and the previous death of her father, who had survived her ill-assorted marriage only a few months, left her mistress of the broad lands and numerous strongholds of the family, with the courage of a hero. and the port of an Amazon.

At length free at once to will and to do, the Lady of Szétzi no longer affected any of the tastes or occupations of her sex. Strikingly beautiful, she knew not the meaning of that pitiful vanity which would have made her the slave of her own loveliness.

Courageous, firm of purpose, and resolute of spirit, she worshipped all that wore the semblance, or that awoke the idea of liberty; and thus to her every soldier who fought under the banner of Rakótzky was as a thing enshrined; and to co-operate in what she considered to be the mightiest work on earth, was at once her only effort and her highest ambition. In this pursuit all other considerations were overlooked—she forgot her sex, her station, and her allegiance; or rather she sacrificed them all without a fear or care for the result, to the one great cause to which she had devoted her whole being.

Tall and stately, it seemed as though Nature had expressly moulded her for the career which she had chosen; while the beauty of her countenance gave an added grace to the pride which sat upon her brow. Herself a zealous Protestant, the cause of Rakótzky was doubly hallowed by the uncompromising declaration of his creed with which he had come forward to erect the standard of independence; and she had opened the gates of Muranzy to him and to his troops, not only as a refuge on their retreat before the Imperial forces, but also to

enable her so to strengthen her garrison that she might be enabled to resist even unto the death the aggressions of the enemy.

As she stood before the Prince, clad in complete armour, with a weapon at her side, and a helmet gay with white and flowing plumes pressed upon her fine dark hair; her large eye flashing with resolve, and her firm clear voice assuring him of welcome and support; he almost believed that Pallas herself had visited earth to combat in his cause; nor did her appearance fail to create an intense sensation among the troops, which was increased when shortly after their arrival in the fortress she admonished them to be true to their cause and to themselves, and informed them that her scouts had already detected the approach of the Imperial army.

The tidings were correct, for Esterházy followed fast upon the rear of the retreating troops of Rakótzky; and when he ascertained that they had taken refuge in Muranzy he detached a strong force to attack the castle, under the command of the gallant Francis Wesselény—the same who was afterwards, in 1655, created Palatine—and whose name, con-

nected as it was with many a deed of prowess, was considered to be almost a passport to success.

Well aware that this same fortress had a century before sustained a close and protracted siege with success against the celebrated General Nicholas Salm, Wesselény was too prudent to venture on an attack until he had taken every precaution; and accordingly he commenced operations by surrounding it on all sides by his troops, strongly guarding its steep and rocky approaches, and making himself master of all the peculiarities of its position; as well as by obtaining through his spies all the information which he could collect relatively to the amount of ammunition and provisions, and the supply of water possessed by the garrison, which he well knew to have become so numerous through the presence of Rakótzý and his people, as to demand and exact an immense consumption of each.

All that he could learn upon the subject convinced him that every precaution had been taken, and that he had to contend not only against numerical force, but also against skill, courage, and judgment; and his summons of immediate surrender having been met by an answer equally

haughty and uncompromising, he could not conceal his astonishment on finding that it had been dictated by the Châtelaine herself; and that every individual in the fortress, including even Rakóty, was under her command, and subservient to her authority.

That she was within the walls he had known when he marched upon the castle; but that she would herself co-operate in its defence, and far less that she would declare herself its champion, he had never anticipated for a moment; and superadded to his ambition of possessing himself of a stronghold before which Nicholas Salm had been worsted, instantly grew a dread of the ridicule which would inevitably attach to him thenceforward should he be thwarted by a woman.

Under the exasperated feelings consequent upon this possibility—and he would not admit even to himself that it was more than barely possible—he immediately commenced the attack; but the strong walls and lofty towers of the fortress resisted all the efforts of his artillery, and the heavy balls rebounded as if in sport from the solid masonry, without effecting the slightest breach.

More and more annoyed by his position, and the utter failure of his first efforts, he issued orders for storming the castle, and gallantly headed the troops himself. This attempt however, desperate as it was, availed him no more than its predecessor had done ; for although his men fought bravely, they were repulsed with great slaughter, and he himself narrowly escaped with life.

Thus passed not only days but weeks. On several occasions Wesselény obtained some trifling advantage, which served to sustain the spirits of his troops, but it was constantly followed by a more serious discomfiture ; for not all his skill and precaution were sufficient to counteract the activity and indomitable daring of his Amazonian adversary.

More than one attempt to win over a portion of the besieged garrison by bribes and promises, and several efforts to create mutiny and to induce desertion, alike failed in their turn ; and Wesselény, when he had exhausted all the usual means employed on such occasions, found himself precisely as far from having obtained the desired end as on the day when he first set down before the fortress ; with the additional mortification of exhausted resources

and attenuated strength. He was in despair ! In vain he taxed alike his memory and his invention, they were both barren of expedients. In vain he summoned a council of his officers, and begged them to assist him with their judgment ; some advised him to attempt impossibilities, and trust to his hitherto propitious star for success ; while the rest, less adulative but more rational, counselled him to raise the siege, and carry the support of his name and arm elsewhere. All admitted the evil, but none could supply a remedy.

Such was the state of things when suddenly a report reached Wesselény, that in consequence of some unexpected successes, the main body of the Transylvanian army was again advancing to relieve their beleaguered comrades ; and at that moment an idea glanced like lightning across his brain, which so engrossed his thoughts that in order to shape it into feasibility he shut himself for several hours in his tent, having previously given orders that he should on no pretext be intruded upon.

On his re-appearance, he immediately dispatched a herald to the Lady of Szétzi, asking safe conduct to and from her presence for one of his officers, an

audience, and a short armistice. The request was at once acceded to, and in a very brief space of time Wesselény found himself standing on one of the ramparts of Muranzi, face to face with its haughty mistress.

Dazzled by her exceeding loveliness, the Imperialist leader used many and energetic arguments to induce her to surrender, long after he discovered that he was guilty of a mere waste of words, and that the spirit of Mary of Szétzi was as immoveable as her own towers. At length the proud Châtelaine lost patience.

“By St. Stephen, Sir Knight!” she exclaimed angrily: “You squander both my time and your own, and would do better to spare both. Do we look here, in our good castle of Muranzi, as though we feared aught that your leader could do against it? Have we played our parts so tamely that we have given you the right to argue thus? By the manes of my father, you are as wordy as a woman! Return to Wesselény, and tell him that we never will surrender while one stone of the fortress rests upon another. And now, away with you—our conference is ended!”

“Be it so, madam, since such is your good will;” said the Imperialist envoy; “I have then only further to crave your attention to this missive from my general, to which he prays that you will courteously vouchsafe an answer at your best leisure.”

“It shall be done, sir;” said the Lady of Szétzi drily: and waving her hand somewhat impatiently for him to withdraw, she turned upon her heel, and walked away.

Great was the astonishment of the Châtelaine of Muranzi when, on tearing open the letter, she discovered that it contained an offer of the hand and heart of the far-famed and redoubted Wesselény. “I have heard so much of your beauty”—thus it ran—“I have seen so much of your courage. You have awakened in my breast an admiration so intense, and a devotion so sincere, that by becoming the partner of my name and fortunes you will make me the happiest of men. Mine is a soldier’s wooing; but to you it will not be unacceptable from its abruptness, for we have neither of us time to waste on the fooleries which weaker women love.”

The lady walked silently and musingly to her own chamber, with the open letter in her hand,

casting her eyes over it occasionally by the way ; and when she had crossed the threshold, and closed the heavy door behind her, she withdrew her helmet, and sat down deep in thought in her large high-backed velvet chair. “ Why, this is wondrous ! ” she at length broke out in the security of her solitude :—“ That *he*—that Wesselény—should seek my hand—*my* hand ; ” and she clenched it hard, as though she would have driven the mailed fingers through its palm : “ This hand, which now toys with nothing gentler than a weapon-hilt ! Why, it is monstrous ! Rakótzky’s enemy — the Emperor’s minion. Yet no—I may not do him such foul wrong, even though he be an Imperialist, for no tongue has ever yet dared to couple the name of Francis Wesselény with aught mean or dishonourable. Were it not so, I might even deem that this strange wooing—But I wrong myself ; He would not *dare*—there breathes not the man who dares to sport with Mary Szétzi ! ”

She paced her room hurriedly for a few moments, and then resumed her seat.

“ What can this mean ? Francis Wesselény ! Why, there is not a court-dame who would not fard

herself to crimson, and practise antics by the hour to win a bow from Francis Wesselény, or fame hath lied. And why should he seek me? I, who had done with love ere I was yet a girl; and wedded but to hate. My foe too! the doughty leader sent forth by a luxurious and ermined monarch to crush a growing hope. Fie on me! I ought to loathe this man! And yet—he deems that his is the right cause—and—who shall say? for heaven itself seems to have declared against Rakóty. But, pshaw! Am I about to play the woman? Is this the stuff that brides are made of?” And with a bitter smile she glanced at the shining armour by which she was covered: “It is unfathomable. I would that he had not thus disturbed my spirit. I have sterner work to do; and foreswore the weakness of my own sex when I strove to emulate the firmness of the other. What is love to me? the love of any suitor—aye, any—even though that one should be Francis Wesselény, whose name has been made a watchword among women. Nay, nay; where am I wandering? Time passes too: and they are relieving the guard upon the walls—I will return his bold missive to this audacious Magnate.” And

she began hastily to refold the letter; and drew towards a massive escrutoire inlaid richly with uncut gems, the spoil of some eastern enemy of a former Szétzi, in order to enclose it in a cover, and speed it back to the camp of the besieging army; but ere she had completed her task, she pillowed her head upon her hand, and fell into another fit of deep musing.

At length she roused herself from her abstraction, and broke into a low laugh; which, despite every effort, had more of bitterness than mirth in its sound; and seizing on a pen that lay near her, she traced a few lines, repeating them aloud as they appeared upon the surface of the paper. "Wesselény, if you really desire an answer to the packet which you have this day caused to be put into my hands, you must come yourself to seek it. Did I not know you, enemy though you are, to be a brave man, I should have vouchsafed none. It may be, however, that the courage by which you have won your present reputation, is an impulse rather than a principle, and if so, we shall never meet in this world; if it be otherwise, and that my reply be necessary to you, as you state, you have

only to stand at midnight beneath the north turret of the castle, where you will see a lamp burning near a casement, from which a ladder of ropes shall be suspended to afford you ingress into the apartment; but you must come alone; and you shall receive my answer.—Mary of Szétzi.”

As her rapid pen paused upon the paper, a deep unconscious sigh heaved the scarf which covered the bosom of the beautiful Châtelaine; and she proceeded, but slowly and deliberately, to fold and secure the letter which she had so hastily written: and she had no sooner added the superscription, than she involuntarily raised her eyes to a mirror which hung before her, and swept back her rich but disordered hair somewhat impatiently, while her fine brow contracted into a frown.

“He has not yet seen me;” she murmured, referring to his letter; “he tells me that ‘he has heard much of my beauty.’ It may be that he will think lightly of it, should he come. But will he risk the venture? Aye, will he; for else he were a coward, and no longer Francis Wesselény. I remember to have heard that the proud Countess Pálffy—the fairest one of a fair race—has loved this

man—*does* love him ; and she is young and gentle—*her* heart was not withered in her youth—She never gave herself to a hated bridegroom and a loveless marriage. And yet he does not wed this dainty woman, with all her pretty arts and fond devices ; and he seeks *me*—I, who am half unsexed by my proud nature, which spurns control, and will not own a curb. Nay, by my father's manes, it is sheer madness !" And again she laughed ; but the woman-spirit had awoke at last, and the joy of being beloved was for a time too mighty to be suppressed.

" And he is said to be so marvellous gallant in his bearing, and so fair to look upon ;" once more she mused. " Even George Rakótzky admits that Hungary boasts not a nobler son, and that he moves the hero that he is ! But I will try him bravely ere I listen to his suit—for I must surely listen were it but from courtesy, let me answer as I may ; and if he fail, why he will be my scorn, and thus his fair face will wear no charm for me !" And with this haughty self-pledge the Châtelaine rose ; once more pressed her helmet upon her brow ; and committing the letter that she had written to the charge of one of

her pages, she bade him speed to the Imperial camp, and deliver it with all care into the hands of Wesselény himself.

It was with very mixed feelings that the Magnate perused the expected packet. For a moment a suspicion of foul play rose to his mind; but he remembered the bright eyes and proud bearing of the Lady, and could not persuade himself that she would stoop to treachery. He re-read the letter; and the romance of the arrangement pleasing his fancy, he willingly overlooked its danger; and instructing the page to inform his Lady that her bidding should be obeyed, he dismissed him with a princely present, and withdrew into his tent.

Once more alone, Wesselény revolved every phase of his position. He was playing for a heavy stake: he was about to peril, if not actually life, at least present liberty, in order to secure success; and he was moreover thrall'd by the surpassing loveliness of his enemy.

"She may be false;" he murmured to himself: "but if she indeed be so, then is she the fairest fiend that ever tempted man to his undoing; and I will dare the venture. I could not brook a bride whose

humours hinged upon the atmosphere, and whose worst terror was a flying feather. We can do nothing against this fortress by force, and it *must* be gained. I have never yet been worsted ; and to be hunted like a smitten hound back to my kennel by a woman, is more than I can look upon with patience ! She may spurn my suit, but she will scarcely play me false ; and the game is well worth the stake." And after a moment's reflection, he desired that the Baron Eckstein might be summoned to his tent.

The gallant soldier obeyed his bidding on the instant ; and to him, strictly enjoining secrecy, Wesselény divulged his midnight expedition, lest during his temporary absence any necessity for action should occur ; or that, in the event of his non-appearance on the morrow, a clue might be afforded to the probable place of his detention.

Having carefully detailed his plans and prospects, and combated the objections of his friend, who strenuously urged a change of purpose, the General next made the tour of his out-lying picquets with his anxious companion, and ascertained that every sentinel was at his post, and that no event had

taken place during the day which could induce a change of measures; and thus assured, he returned to his tent, where he pledged Eckstein in a cup of amber-coloured Tokáy; and having repeated his wishes and precautions, he ultimately wrung the hand of his friend; and recommending to him above all things discretion and secrecy, he prepared for his adventure.

It has been already hinted that Francis Wes-selény was a man of surpassing beauty; but it remains to be added that at the period of our tale he was in the very zenith of his attractions, and by no means unconscious of their extent, for the beauties of the court had for several successive seasons taught him the welcome secret. It is therefore scarcely wonderful that on the present occasion, fraught as it was with the most important results, not only to himself but to his cause, he should have endeavoured to enhance their effect by all the aids of art, and found the labour pleasant; while it is certain that the comments of his companion, when he at length stood before him in all the splendour of a costume than which none more chivalric or gorgeous exists in Europe, were by

no means distasteful either to his hopes or to his vanity.

And assuredly no more resplendent knight ever sought to win entrance into his lady's bower-chamber than Francis Wesselény, when, with his jewelled dress closely covered with a large and ample mantle of dark cloth, he traversed his own camp, responding in a low and smothered voice to the challenge of the watchful sentinels; and abandoned himself that night to an adventure that for aught he knew might end in his destruction.

It was pitchy dark: the moon was in her first quarter; and, unable to contend with the heavy scud that was drifting rapidly and closely across the sky, she had apparently hidden herself in very despair of taking her appropriate station in the heavens: the deep silence was only broken by the occasional laughter of the guard, who were assembled about their watch-fires; and all promised well for the secrecy of his expedition when Wesselény left his tent, and made his hasty way towards the northern turret of the beleaguered castle of Muzranzi.

When he reached the base of the rock on which

the fortress was seated, he at once perceived the difficulty of his undertaking; for at the particular point which had been named to him as that on which he was to gain admission to the castle, the rock rose almost perpendicularly to an immense height, and mocked the human foot; while the promised light, which twinkled from a casement in the turret, looked like a star in the dark blue horizon.

But Wesselény would not be thus repulsed. He saw at once that without aid from within the edifice, all ingress from that spot was impossible; and accordingly he closed his eyes for a few seconds to enable him to distinguish objects more clearly athwart the darkness, and then set himself to discover what measures had been taken to facilitate his attempt. He was not long in determining their extent, for a slight sound enabled him to detect the presence of some unwonted substance resting against the steep surface of the rock which swayed in the wind as it swept by; and which, on extending his hand in order to ascertain its nature, he at once discovered to be the rope-ladder, whose assistance he had been promised in the trite and inconclusive billet of the Châtelaine.

For an instant Wesselény paused ; and even *his* stout heart quailed for a second, as he could not disguise from himself that the quivering of one pulse would suffice to hurl him to destruction. He looked upward to the small and trembling light, and then downward to the deep ditch at his feet, into which the tremour of a nerve must inevitably plunge him ; and he remembered, in spite of himself, that he had received no pledge of safety, no assurance of good faith, and that he was a mere adventurer rushing on his own fate.

But ere long he grew ashamed of these misgivings ; and as he recalled the confidence which he had placed in Eckstein, and the contemptuous scorn with which he had rejected his remonstrances, and listened to his misgivings, he felt that he must pursue the adventure, end as it might : and accordingly, grasping the slender cords in his hands, and commending himself and his country to his patron saint, he boldly placed his foot on the first link of the ladder, and abandoned himself to his fortunes.

These proved to be sufficiently difficult, for the height whence the ladder was suspended was so great, that the Magnate could not steady the frail

machine even when his whole weight rested on it ; nor prevent its being the plaything of every gust of wind which beat against the rock. There were moments, indeed, when the motion became so violent and painful as to create a giddiness that compelled Wesselény to cling with all his strength to the cords, lest he should lose his hold, and perish in the dark abyss beneath him ; nor was it until he had undergone an hour of intense suffering and extreme danger, that after clinging for a few moments to the frame of the open window in order to restore his breath, he sufficiently recovered his strength to vault into the chamber, where he expected to meet his beautiful but exacting mistress.

When he had accomplished this feat, however, he found himself alone in a vast apartment, dimly lighted by a heavy silver lamp resting upon an ebony pedestal ; but he had scarcely time to look around him ere he was violently seized from behind, his weapons wrenched from his breast, himself flung to the ground, and coarse threats poured into his ear that if he offered to resist, his life should be the forfeit ; and while he was yet marvelling in his bewilderment if he were really awake, he was again

rudely clasped by strong hands, lifted from the floor, and thrust into a dark and narrow closet, evidently used as a prison-cell.

For the first few moments astonishment superseded every other feeling in the mind of the betrayed noble ; but after a while the recollection of his own ill-timed rashness, the dishonour which would accrue from his voluntary abandonment of his post, and the consequent dispersion and disgrace of the troops which had been entrusted to him, rose to his memory, and almost maddened him ; and perhaps it was fortunate, under the circumstances, that the period permitted to him for this self-reproach was brief, and that his miserable reflections were terminated by the appearance of a tall, sombre, passionless-looking individual, clad in black, and bearing a dark lantern which only tended to make the obscurity about him more dense, and who addressed him in deep and measured tones, little calculated to soothe his irritation.

“ Sir Count ;” said this ill-omened visitor : “ I need not tell you whose prisoner you now are, for you are in the Castle of Muranzi, and you well know by whom it is defended. Your reception has

been somewhat rough, but your fate is in your own hands. My noble lady offers you her heart, and her broad lands and bristling fortresses, if you will quit the Imperial service, and become the ally of Rakóty. If not, you can guess the alternative—you die within the hour; and your troops left without a leader will fall an easy prey to our brave garrison. What is your answer?"

"That I scorn alike you and your foul errand!" indignantly replied the noble prisoner. "Deeply as I feel the insult which has been offered to me, I will never purchase exemption from its consequences by an act of perfidy. My word is sacred; and such I deemed must be that of the high-born lady to whom I entrusted my safety. I have been deceived; but I am content rather to suffer through my misplaced confidence than to become false to my cause. I disclaim the right of your proud Châtelaine to hold me captive; and I here, as a true Knight, declare against it."

"It is not a question of right but of might, Sir Count;" coldly remarked his unmoved listener; "nor is the argument that of captivity and freedom, but of life and death. The Lady of Szétzi is not

one who loves fine phrases, or who defers to the law for her decisions: and I am no further instructed than to offer you your choice of death within the hour as the soldier of the Emperor, or the broad lands and fair hand of the Châtelaine of Muranzi, on condition of your becoming the champion of the Liberators. Once more, what is your answer?"

"I have already declared it;" said the Magnate firmly: "It is far more easy for Francis Wesselény to die than to become a traitor."

The tall dark man persisted no further, but bowing slightly to the prisoner, retired from the room, and closed the door behind him.

For a long dreary hour, which seemed to him to have been lengthened into an age, the gallant prisoner was left to the undisturbed indulgence of his bitter thoughts. It was cruel thus to be cut off in the prime of his existence, when honours and successes were awaiting him, could he but pursue the fortunes which had been destined to gild his manhood; and it was doubly maddening thus to have fallen a victim to his own good faith and misplaced confidence. At times he comforted

himself with the remembrance that it was far more glorious to die with honour than to live disgraced, even although the disgrace should be gilded by wealth, and marked by pleasure; but even this reflection could not divest his fate of its sting. The world was still so bright to him—It held so many who loved him—But these regrets availed nothing; and his misfortunes were only embittered by the memory that they had been brought upon him by one of the loveliest beings he had ever beheld, and the only one whom he had ever loved.

“What is Mary of Szétzi to me?” he asked himself; “save my executioner?—A beautiful fiend with a light in her dark eye, and a poison in her soul—Why have I played the madman for a fair brow and a proud smile?—I will think no more of her!”

But despite this doughty resolution, the mind of the noble prisoner would persist in dwelling upon the magnificent memory of the haughty Châtelaine; and when the door again fell back, he started as though he expected to see her once more stand before him.

She came not, however; it was the same cold intruder as before; but this time he evidently did

not come alone, for the measured tread of armed men was audible in the gallery beyond the prison-room. When he had reached the centre of the narrow floor, the same alternative was once more offered to Wesselény, and once more rejected; when the space about the captive was instantly filled with guards; and a strong light being flung over the scene by a couple of torches carried by retainers in the livery of the Lady of Szétzi, the imprisoned noble was enabled to distinguish in the centre of the group a dark stern man, armed with a naked weapon, whose grim garb and peculiar attitude gave sufficient evidence of his hateful office.

“You are welcome;” said Wesselény fixing his eyes steadily on the executioner, and speaking as though he was unconscious of any other presence; “I will but say one prayer and withdraw the scarf from my throat ere I claim your services; and let it be your boast henceforward, that among the false-hearted traitors whom you may have sent to expiate their crime and their dishonour before their time, you have helped one true man to a forgetfulness of the foul perfidy of which he was the victim.”

As he ceased speaking he sank upon his knee ; and burying his face in his spread hands, was instantly absorbed in prayer. But there was an eye upon him there of which he never dreamt ; and as he prepared to rise, and had already begun to remove his throat-scarf, his gaze fell upon the Lady of Szétzi.

She was no longer clad in armour, but attired in a long and ample mourning robe of velvet, clasped from the throat to the feet with gems of almost priceless value. "Wesselény," she said tenderly ; "you have conquered ! It has cost me much to bend my proud spirit to any vassalage, even that of a husband whom I honoured ; and you must forgive me if I resolved to have full assurance that he was worthy of that honour, ere I perilled all my future happiness. You have come nobly forth from a sharp trial ; and you are worthy of the sacrifice even of *my* freedom. A brave man only would have dared to ask my hand, or have hoped to win it : you have done both, and from this moment I am yours. The cause for which you would have endured death must be the right one ; and Muranzi is henceforward an Imperial fortress."

The amazement of Wesselény was extreme. He looked from the beautiful widow to the armed men by whom she was surrounded, and again upon the radiant loveliness by which his heart had been taken captive even in a less seemly garb; and every lingering remain of displeasure and indignation vanished at once, as he bent his knee before the queenly beauty who addressed him, and pressed his lips to her fair hand.

“And the Prince Rakótzý?” he at length murmured, as the recollection of all which this unlooked-for reconciliation would involve swept across his mind.

“Must pass the walls unquestioned and unfollowed at midnight;” replied the Lady; “at the head of all his troops. We must not wade to the altar through blood; nor must my secession from his cause involve the destruction of the Patriot-Prince. His friends are already on the march, and he will be enabled to join them in a few hours. He must be allowed free passage through your camp.”

“He shall;” said Wesselény; “I was sent hither simply with instructions to subdue the fortress of Muranzi.”

"And you have done it," smiled Mary of Szétzi; "the garrison has surrendered at discretion; and now let us hence, my lord, to a more seemly apartment. For to-day you must be content to remain partially a prisoner, lest some unlucky contact should breed a feud. To-morrow the fortress will be freed of all who may be displeasing to you. Will you submit to this temporary captivity?"

"I am content so to be a prisoner for ever," replied Wesselény, as he took the proffered hand of the lady to lead her forth.

And, strange to say, the marriage proved a happy one.

CHAPTER IV.

“ You have played us false, Wesselény;” exclaimed Pálffy; “ I appeal to the ladies here present if you have not played us false? Was such a love-tale ever heard? or do you mean us to take your Amazonian ancestress, stout head and bold heart though she had, as a sample of our Hungarian beauties? Why she was enough to alarm a whole horde of Tartars: and it required nothing less than a Wesselény to run the risk of what might result from such a bridal! Fancy yourself wooing a bride cased in chain armour, and kissing a hand bristling with a gauntlet!”

“ Or paying compliments under the protection of a body-guard;” said Pratnaÿer: “ I must support the case against you, Baron; for truly in no country have I ever found women less disposed to appeal to anything sterner or less agreeable than their own attractions; and I sincerely trust that some one may be here among us ready to revenge the sex.”

“Were it not that it would be unfair;” said the host; “I would ask you to take the office upon yourself.”

“And most gladly would I do so;” was the reply; “did I not feel that there are several of my friends now present who are much more competent to do it effectively. Here is M. Karolyi for instance.”

“The cause is so agreeable that I dare not refuse to further it;” said the individual who had been indicated; “and as it will be easy to find among the records of the past in a land like ours, a legend of beauty and of truth, I need not detain you a moment even for the purpose of selection; for I do not think that I can find one more suited to my purpose than that of Katherine of Budethin.”

“I know the castle of Budethin well;” observed the host; “and was already aware that there was a remarkable tradition attached to that portion of it which yet remains a ruin, although I never yet chanced to learn its purport. Count Stephen Csáky has indeed, in the instance of that fortress, seemed to defy even time itself.”

“It was while sojourning with him in his magni-

ficent halls ;” remarked Karolyi ; “ that I became acquainted with the story which I am now about to tell : and when you have heard it you will have little difficulty in believing that it made so deep an impression on my fancy as to render it an easy task to recal all its details, from its having been told to me upon the spot where I had ocular testimonials of its truth. But I will not delay you longer by my comments, than to add that the legend will lose much of its charm to my own listeners, from the fact that coming from my lips it will be divested of the grace which it gained from those of the beautiful girl to whom I am myself indebted for it. She was a young peasant, the daughter of a Kissutzan farmer, who claims descent from Irla, the favourite waiting-woman of my fair and ill-fated heroine ; and be her parentage what it may, assuredly one of the most lovely beings which this or any other land can boast. The Count Csáky has placed her about the person of his daughter ; but it is to be hoped that both mistress and maid will be spared the miseries and sufferings of their fair ancestresses.”

“ We will permit no more anticipatory com-

ments;" said Pálffy gaily; "or your story will become as unexciting as the novels which are read by a grand-aunt of my own, who always commences by the last chapter, in order to feel at her ease throughout the perusal of the work, by her previous knowledge of its catastrophe."

"I have indeed been very impolitic, and I deserve the rebuke;" replied Karolyi; "but so many memories crowded upon me at the moment, with a very pretty girl as the corner-stone on which to build them up, that I did not reflect how much my credit as a tale-teller would be likely to suffer from my reminiscences as a guest. I will offend no more, however; but forthwith endeavour to enlist your sympathies in the fate of

KATHERINE OF BUDETHIN.

The beautiful river Wáag, one of the most capricious and picturesque streams that ever traversed an incomparable country, here flowing through a valley dense with vegetation, and laughing in the light; there gliding smoothly under the tall shadows of a far-spreading and majestic forest; and anon forcing its boiling and boisterous passage athwart rocky

ravines, bald with the storms and struggles of centuries; rushes rapidly and wildly through the northern portion of the county of Trenschein, towards the frontier; flashes and foams round the base of the mountain through which a road is cut to the little town of Sillein, distant about a mile; and thence rolls on through a portion of the chain, forcing its way, and in some places digging it, by the violence of its current, amid heights covered with eternal snows, or rocks worn bare by the tempests and rains which continually assail them.

At a right angle, at the entrance of the plain, the rapid Kissutza falls into this noble river; and however insignificant the minor stream may appear during the droughts of summer, when travellers pass it with impunity both mounted and in carriages, the Wáag no sooner rises, and seems to threaten it with annihilation amid its own more mighty waters, than it instantly asserts its existence, and resists the encroachments of its more powerful neighbour, by receiving into its bosom all the tributary torrents from the mountain; and then rushing down boiling, broiling, and foaming, into its parent stream; which it swells to such a height

that its power is recognised in the vicinity, by the fact that the valley near which it pours itself into the bed of the Wáag is called the Valley of Kissutza.

The Kissutzans are poor, being wholly dependent for their subsistence on the sale of the timber of their vicinity; which, although of fine quality and in great quantity, requires difficult and distant transport to find an advantageous market. Their costume is a *joppa*, or long gown of Halena cloth, made of the wool of black sheep. They are a remarkably fine race; handsome, muscular, of noble stature, and inured to fatigue; in short, true mountaineers, to whom the heavens ever supply a sufficient canopy, and the greensward or the forest a fitting resting-place.

It is with extreme exertion and at great risk that these hardy sons of the mountain force their deeply-laden rafts from the impetuous Kissutza, swollen and stormy from the action of the frothy torrents, on to the comparatively peaceful current of the Wáag; but their endurance of fatigue, patiently and hopefully borne, is one of the characteristics of their race; and from generation to generation, son succeeds to

father, as though no other avocation could engross the energies of the hardy Kissutzans.

Near the entrance of the valley stand two castles flanking the road to Poland and Silesia, and connecting the lovely country through which they pass with such feudal memories of the olden time, as to make it a landmark for the curious sympathies of the present. This road, leaving the ribs of the mountain, through which it may fairly be said to have been hewn, when it reaches the valley becomes broader and more commodious, as though it had expanded under the genial influence of a bright unobscured sky and a glowing soil, to lure the traveller onward, with a fair promise to be too soon broken; for when near the haunted Castle of Hrisco (the ruined pile over which a stony monk keeps guard, and of whose foul fate the peasant tells in trembling at his winter's hearth), it again leads the pilgrim over the rugged passes of the Oblazow mountain, amid whose fastnesses a struggle once took place between love and despair, in which 'twere hard to say who was the victor.

Scarcely a hundred yards from the main road, where it traverses a bridge in approaching Sillein,

on the opposite bank of the Wáag stands the Castle of Budethin. Lording it over the plain, it seems to make even the two rivers tributary to its greatness, for they form a junction beneath its walls at right angles, surrounding it on two sides; while on the third it was formerly protected by a deep ditch many feet in width, and constantly filled with water; so that this strong fortress might be said to occupy an island, whence its tall towers and strong buttresses sent forth their stern message of menace and defiance.

Immediately opposite to the castle of Budethin, a bald, abrupt, and lofty mountain intercepts the western view, and closes the gorge which gives entrance into the valley. This picturesque locality is well suited to the frowning fortress; nor can the traveller who looks upon it fail to feel that it is a link in the strong, strange, and mysterious chain which binds the present with the past. The spectres of buried centuries seem to stalk along those ruined ramparts, and to look forth from those lofty towers, upon a bare and precipitous height, which, rising in the direction of Tyrnau, is known as the Lion's Rock; and upon which stands the wondrous castle

of the Fakusits, the boldest and most extraordinary edifice in the country.

From a gigantic mountain stretching to the right and left, and forming a portion of the great chain of the Carpathians, rises an abrupt mass of rock upon which the castle is seated. The building is composed of three several divisions, two of which are curiously involved with the irregularities of its rugged and capricious surface; while the third seems scarcely to cling to its foundations upon the declivity; but unequal as they are, rears its bold towers and bristling walls, freely and boldly, to the height of those of which it forms a part.

The rock is composed of lime stone, and the material of which the castle is built differs so little in tint, that from the plain it is impossible to distinguish the exact outline of the edifice.

The position of the two fortresses is thus as peculiar as it is picturesque; and the conviction fastens at once upon the stranger who looks on them, that they must have been in feudal times one continual feast, or one perpetual feud; and in sooth they are connected by a tale which, in our

less troublous times, may well secure to both a place in our remembrance.

At the period to which we revert, the castle of Budethin was the principal stronghold of the powerful family of Szuniogh, who held uncontrolled dominion over the whole neighbourhood ; and who possessed enormous influence, not only from their wealth, but from the fact that the great and acknowledged services of several of the name, had secured to them immunities which greatly increased their local as well as national consequence. The head of the family was the Count Caspar ; a gloomy misanthrope, who was content to live on the memory of the past, and the power of the present, without one care for the future ; and who had rendered Budethin as solitary and deserted as though its lord had been an outcast from society, unknown alike to honour and to his sovereign.

Throughout the reign of the two Ferdinands, he never swerved from his cold and selfish system ; and no rein was drawn before the gate of Budethin when the rider had strength to pass on his way unscathed. No hand beat upon the gate, no lips pressed the horn at the portal, save those of some

wayfarer who feared to dare the mountain-pass without rest and refreshment; and yet all were ready to admit that the lord of the fortress was strictly and even severely just, and that they had nothing to fear from his equity; but they nevertheless shrunk from his impetuous self-will, and that impatience of restraint which led him to acts of unnecessary violence and outrage, at which his own better nature afterwards, and too late, taught him to revolt.

Restless by nature, and brave by temperament, he frequently left the fortress at the head of his followers, and sallied forth against the Turks; with whom he came into perpetual contact both as Lord of the castle of Szendro, and Deputy-Lieutenant of the county of Neograd. But even when both his head and arm were thus occupied, he lost none of his authority at home, for all his dependants so well understood his nature, that during his absence his memory haunted every hall throughout the fortress like a shadow; and no one dared to transgress, by word or deed, what he knew to be the will and pleasure of his despotic Suzerain.

The Count Caspar had an only child, a daughter,

in whom was centred all the pride and delight of her father's heart ; while by her mother the Lady Susanna Bánffy, she was idolized as the only object upon which she could lavish her tenderness, and feel sure of a return. She was very beautiful, and submissive, and light-hearted ; loving nature as her fairest playfellow ; and like the wood-anemone, paying back in harmony every touch of the breath of kindness. The castle was to her a world, for she knew none other ; no eye was permitted to rest on her save those of her father's retainers, to whom she was as " some bright particular star," above their hope, if not their worship ; and thus she grew to girlhood without a fear, a care, or a misgiving of that future which was for her to be so fraught with fate ; while the will of her father was a law beyond which she dreamed not that there could be an appeal.

No smile ever visited her mother's lips save that which her own love called there ; and she no sooner learnt that sad secret than her tenderness and care redoubled ; and the Lady Susanna at times forgot, in the endearments of her lovely child, the cold blank years of wedded disappointment which she

had passed with the stern Lord of Budethin, to whom she had never seemed more than a vassal bound to obey his every behest ; and if for a while the proud and ancient blood of the Bánffys revolted at such unnatural thralldom, the day at length came when no command, however arbitrary or unreasonable, could quicken a single pulse ; and the Lady Susanna moved through the lordly halls of Budethin like one to whom they were neither a home nor a hope.

There is a deep spring in the heart of woman, and its waters are pure and warm as the mystic streams which bring healing from the mysterious core of the eastern mountains. It asks only to be permitted to gush forth, and to pour its healthful current over all it loves ! But, alas ! it may be dried up and turned aside by cold restraints and rude impediments ; the soft wave may exhaust itself upon the rock from which it should well out, and leap rejoicing into the light ; and leaving there the trace of what it might have been, become lost for ever, absorbed by the stony basin which it should so joyously have overflowed.

Thus was it with the Lady of Budethin. In her

youth she had dreamt of a community of tastes, of interests, and of affections ; but she had wedded one, who in seeking her, had sought only to perpetuate his own proud race ; and to do so through the medium of a bride of blood as ancient as his own. He had found a fitting opportunity for both in the fair and wealthy daughter of the haughty Barons of Bánffy ; but she had borne him no son ; and superadded to his original indifference, came the disappointment of his hopes and his ambition, which destroyed the last link that had for a time bound him to her affections.

The Count Caspar devotedly loved his daughter ; but even when the golden ringlets of the Lady Katherine were streaming over his bosom, and her sweet lips were pressed to his, he remembered that she would take another name ; and, perhaps, become the mother of sons who would perpetuate another race ; and the memory was wormwood to him ; and thus, while he could not visit his displeasure on the fair creature who nestled so lovingly in his bosom, his coldness towards her mother increased until it almost deepened into aversion.

Then, indeed, it was that the Lady Susanna

became conscious of the blessing of such a child ; for when the harshness of the Count Caspar had crushed her mother to the earth, the gentle tenderness of the devoted girl once more healed the wounded spirit, and bade it bear up, and hope.

Sometimes, after a temporary absence, the Noble would call his daughter to him, and while feasting on her sweet and gentle welcome, question her of her pursuits and amusements while he had been far distant ; and those were golden moments to the happy Katherine, who never failed to trace all her enjoyment to her heart-bowed mother. She would detail each little ailment, and show how the careful and untiring love of the Lady Susanna had shortened the hours of suffering ; recapitulate every innocent or useful employment, and prove how the one had been enhanced, and the other rendered effective, by the same wakeful and holy influence ; and there were times when her anxious tales, rendered graphic by a child's devotedness, awoke a smile upon her father's lips, and that the smile was turned towards her mother—brief was it ever, but it *was* a smile—and on such nights Katherine pressed her pillow with a gladdened heart, and

dreamed such dreams as angels may be thought to have, sure that their waking will reflect them back.

Such was the life of the Count Caspar's daughter; and as he never breathed her name beyond the walls of the fortress, he hugged himself in the hope that her very existence would remain unguessed at, until he should place her in the arms of the bridegroom whom he might consider to be worthy of her; but in this, at least, the indomitable will of the haughty chieftain availed him nothing; for whispers of the extreme loveliness of the wealthy heiress got bruited abroad; and numerous were the noble youths who vowed to themselves the conquest of the Lady Katherine.

Foremost among these enthusiastic suitors was the Count Francis Forgáts; the representative and hope of a family whose proud name is involved in all that is brave and chivalrous in Hungarian history. Scarcely more than twenty years of age, gallant, handsome, and for the time in which he lived unusually accomplished; beloved by his friends, feared by his enemies, and appreciated by both, it seemed as though fate could not have designed a more fitting bridegroom for the fair heiress of Budethin.

For a time he loved the maiden only from report, and his imagination was taken captive by self-created visions of the rose which bloomed amid the gloomy walls of Budethin; but, ere long, impelled by a curiosity which led him to dare any venture in order to obtain a momentary glimpse of his mysterious mistress, he contrived by means of gold and courage to accomplish his object; and not only looked upon the beautiful girl until his eyes ached with excess of light, but eventually had the delight of seeing her own wondering but not displeased gaze fasten upon himself, with more of enquiry than either fear or anger in its expression.

When Forgáts first saw the Lady Katherine, she was tending her flowers in a sunny nook, formed by the heavy buttresses on the southern side of the castle walls. She was kneeling beside a knot of those dark crimson carnations whose richly spiced perfume gives to the inhabitants of Europe their best idea of the scented gales of Araby; and drawing them together into a cluster, that they might have the support of some slight willowy twigs which she was planting in the soil about their roots. Her large beaver hat, with its long and snowy fea-

thers, lay on the path beside her ; and her bright and beautiful face was partially shaded by a cloud of glossy ringlets as black as night. In figure she was tall and slight, but exquisitely moulded ; and as pliant as the flexile twigs with which she was engaged. Her eyes were large, and her eyebrows slightly and finely pencilled ; but the great charm of her lovely countenance existed in her mouth, whose lips of the colour of crushed rosebuds were arched as those of a Grecian statue. Her tiny hands seemed only made to toy with flowers, they were so white and so diminutive ; and over all this beauty there was flung the spell of innocent happiness, which gave grace to every gesture and to every glance.

As she toiled in her pretty playfulness at the graceful task, she carolled out in a silvery voice which seemed to float upon the glad air, a wild and plaintive ballad, whose burthen was the complaint of a noble Magyar maiden held captive by the Turks ; and as her accents rose and fell, the heart of Forgáts beat high, and he marvelled if the poor prisoner could have been half as beautiful as the fair creature who was now giving sweetness to her sorrows.

Suddenly she shook back the long ringlets from her cheeks and brow, and looked up with a smile upon her lips, as if to greet the sunshine which was resting so lovingly upon her; and as she did so she encountered the admiring and passionate gaze of the handsome young Count. Her eyes instinctively fell beneath the look of his; but even upon the path chequered with light and shadow, she seemed to see that bright and noble countenance. A deep blush rose to her temples, and a strange flutter made her heart dance within her; when hastily sweeping her hand across her eyes she once more looked up, as if to assure herself that she had really not been cheated by a fancy.

Who shall say what bright visions passed across the spirit of the maiden, as she became assured of the reality of the unexpected apparition? Or who shall venture to decide wherefore, after having thus satisfied herself of the fact, she hastily retreated into the castle? Might it not be the first timid shrinking of unconscious passion, which yearned to indulge itself in the delicious dreams of solitude? In sooth it seemed to be even so: for when the Lady Katherine, having hurriedly traversed the

long galleries which led to her apartments, at length reached her chamber, she at once dismissed her favourite attendant Irla ; and having closed the door carefully after her, flung herself down upon the oriental divan which occupied an angle of the room, and burying her beautiful face amid the luxurious cushions, as though there had been busy eyes about her to note alike the blush and the smile by which it was lighted up into still brighter loveliness, abandoned herself to a dreamlike and vague feeling of overwhelming happiness, to which she had hitherto been a stranger.

Until that eventful day Katherine of Budethin had never looked upon any face likely to be more dear to her than that of her father : their few guests at the mid-day banquet were his contemporaries and brothers in arms ; and the Castellan was old and gray ; and thus, when her eye fell upon Forgáts, she at once felt, although she could not have put the feeling into words, that she had looked upon her fate !

Oh ! that first, beautiful, uncalculating, unselfish sentiment of love—how pure, how holy is it in the heart of woman ! Her spirit may become seared

by time and trial—her suspicions may be aroused—her doubts awakened, by years, and sorrows, and those bitter tears which are wrung forth with an effort that would have been cheaply spared to the victim at the price of the pouring out of her life's blood ; but nothing can rob her of the memory of that first, transient, and elysian dream, worth in itself the whole term of an embittered, chilly, and waking existence.

The Lady Katherine was now dreaming this glorious dream—walking through an earthly paradise of her own creation—and never giving a thought to the serpent which might, even in the same moment, be trailing its poisonous length under the self-created roses of her path.

What a beautiful belief is that of the Orientals, that spiders extract their venom from roses ! for how many a human being has been ruined by that which seemed for the moment to be fairer and brighter than all around ?

Alas, for the Lady Katherine !

The young Count Forgáts, on his side, departed from the castle with the same secrecy as he had entered it ; but with far different feelings. Hitherto

his admiration of beauty had been like that of the butterfly, which flutters over whole beds of blossoms, sweeping each with its painted wing, but resting nowhere; every fair face had pleased him for a moment, and in the next been forgotten; but the vision of the Count Caspar's daughter was graven on his heart. She was so young, so graceful, and so artless; and he knew (and this to a man of his fastidious taste was perhaps her best attraction), that no eye save his own had yet looked love into hers. He vowed to himself that he would win her, if gold, or courage, or devotion could weigh with her proud father.

But previously the young Magnate resolved to assure himself that his addresses would be acceptable to the maiden, for he was not one to receive a reluctant bride at the hand of a stern parent. It must be confessed, however, that he did not feel any very serious misgivings of the success of his suit, should it be brought to depend on the inclinations of the fair Katherine; for he had read her eye as it met his own, and assuredly he had detected no shade of displeasure in its expression.

The three powerful influences of love, wealth,

and daring, will individually do much in any emergency, but collectively they are irresistible to all the subordinate agents in an undertaking like that of the Count Forgáts; and thus he found little difficulty in procuring an interview with the lady of his thoughts.

Totally unconscious that any blame could attach to either from their meeting; and delighted to see and to converse with the handsome cavalier, who had never been absent from her thoughts since she first beheld him from her rampart-garden, the maiden did not even chide his intrusion; and when he told her that it was only to assure himself of her favour that he had stolen secretly into the castle; and that no sooner should he have induced her to return the affection which was now the charm and hope of his existence than he would boldly declare his love, and urge his suit with her noble father; than she resigned herself willingly at once to his arguments, and consented to meet him whenever it could be effected with safety to their secret.

And thus a week seldom passed away of which many hours were not spent by the lovers side by side, in that pure and trustful communion which is

the best earnest of sincere affection ; and the more Forgáts became familiar with the gentle and loving nature, and the simple and truthful beauty of Katherine's character, the more he acknowledged to himself that without her, life would hereafter be for him a cheerless and a dreary blank ; while to her his presence and his affection became ere long so necessary, that when she heard that it was possible her father might refuse his sanction to their union, although the lover admitted that he had little fear that such would be the case, as the ambition of the Count Caspar for his daughter, lovely as she was, could scarcely over-vault the proud house of Forgáts ; still even the mere possibility of such a misery so terrified the maiden that she urged delay whenever the subject was started by her impatient suitor ; and besought him to rest satisfied, though it should be but for a brief while longer, with the tranquil happiness of which they were then possessed ; and Forgáts reluctantly yielded day after day to her sweet arguments ; for how could he oppose the trusting creature that he loved !

At length Katherine herself, feeling how dear her

lover had become to her young heart, and trembling as she remembered that her father's anger might rouse him to opposition should he discover her acquaintance with a stranger ; as well as impelled by that yearning which an affectionate and frank nature ever feels to confide in those it loves ; determined to pour forth her secret on the bosom of her mother ; and it was in the sweet sad gloaming of a day in which Forgáts had urged her even more strenuously than his wont, to allow him to ask her of her father, that she resolved to make the mighty effort.

The Lady of Budethin was seated near an open window, with a small table inlaid with ebony and sandal-wood before her, on which lay open an illuminated missal bound in velvet, and clasped with silver. She was a tall and stately matron, closely draped in an ample robe of black, whose rich and heavy folds fell in masses about her ; her hair, which was prematurely gray, was folded like a band of silver beneath her black hood ; her features were strikingly fine ; but there was a withered look about her, a dimness in her large eye, and a peculiar sadness in her smile, which told that time

had had less part in her decay than sorrow ; that deep and hopeless sorrow fed by its own silence, for which the world has little sympathy, and against which the victim disdains to struggle.

As her daughter entered the room, the Lady of Budethin deposited between the pages of the missal a large rosary of ivory ; and drawing up her feet, which were small and beautifully moulded, upon the prayer-cushion on which she had evidently been recently kneeling, she welcomed her with one of her fond sad smiles, and flinging her arms about her neck, drew her tenderly to her bosom.

“ My own fair child ! ” she murmured softly.

“ Mother ! dear mother ! ” whispered the maiden in response ; and then, withdrawing from the clasp of the lady, and sinking down upon the cushion at her feet, she buried her face upon her knees, and poured forth all her secret.

The Châtelaine sat aghast, and a cold dew gathered upon her forehead as she listened. When the sweet voice half choked with sobs, and half gay with hope, ceased to vibrate on her ear, she swept her fingers across her brow, as if to assure herself that she did not dream ; and then laying her hand upon the

maiden's head, she gasped out painfully: "Alas! my child; are we to be a doomed and blighted race? Tell me not that you love him, for you will never be the wife of Francis Forgáts!"

Katherine sprang to her feet; "How say you, mother? Never be his wife? Then hear me swear——"

"Katherine—my child—forbear;" interposed the Lady; "You know not what you do. Alas! you guess not what you have already done. Ill-fated girl! Are you not the daughter of Caspar Szuniogh? And do you hope to brave *his* will? Look upon me——" And she rose from her seat, and drew up her stately figure to its full height. "To-day I am gray and withered, wasted alike in body and in spirit, but I was not always thus. Katherine, the Lady Susanna Bánffy, the beauty and the heiress, lacked not suitors. The great, the wealthy, and the brave, were there to contend for my hand; and my proud woman-heart rejected each in turn, until I saw your father. Forgive me, my poor child, if I dare say even to you that he was my evil genius. He came to my father's halls with no design to wed his daughter. It was on his

return from an expedition against the Infidels that he claimed our hospitality ; and superadded to the welcome which he must ever have received as a fellow-noble, he met that also which was due to a brave man who had just achieved a fresh triumph for his country. I was then in the full bloom of my maiden beauty : poets sang my praises, and lovers looked their admiration of my charms. I trod the halls of my father's castle of Lossonta, as though my feet must spurn a lowlier path ; and expected to find in all who approached me, new lovers and new friends. It was a strange state of existence, Katherine ; and when I look back upon it my head grows dizzy, and I feel like one who dreams—But you do not heed me, love.”

“ Oh say not so, sweet mother,” faltered out the fair girl, who had again sunk down upon the cushion with a pale cheek and a trembling heart ; “ I have not lost a word ; hitherto you have never spoken to me of yourself—your hidden griefs, your voluntary solitude.”

“ Nor should I do it now ;” said the Lady mournfully ; “ were it not that I would fain preserve you from a fate as dreary as my own. You are young,

Katherine, very young ; you have long years before you ; and oh, life is a weary waste when it has neither hope nor joy to gild it ! And broken hearts are the mere creations of poets and romancers—they are indeed few whom sorrow kills ere they have borne it long. I was telling you that your father came to my happy home : he came honoured and welcome, but he spared no thought to me. He was cold, haughty, and reserved,—excited only by tales of chivalry and conquest ; and apparently insensible to everything save his reputation as a soldier. Various circumstances detained him at Lossonta ; and although, had his stay been more brief, I might have been careless of his contemptuous neglect, as weeks went by I became piqued at his indifference. He was the first noble who had come within the influence of my attractions, and failed to own their power ; nor did it make me the less ambitious to attract his notice when I heard that he never yet had paid his court to any of my sex. In short, Katherine, his extraordinary coldness commenced by wounding my vanity ; and having excited alike my surprise and my curiosity, finished by rousing my heart. The voice of adu-

lation and entreaty became hateful to me; my step grew less assured, my glance less disdainful; and to escape the importunity of my persevering suitors I used to take refuge in my own apartments, and there dream of the haughty Lord of Budethin. It must have been destiny, for to no one would I entrust my cherished secret; and thus my own weak fondness could have had no share in the change which suddenly came over the Count Caspar; but one day, when I had heard that he was to depart upon the morrow, and that I was seated in my chamber indulging in solitude the grief with which I was overwhelmed by the intelligence, one of my women came to summon me to the presence of my father. You may conceive with what astonishment, on my entrance into his private apartment with swollen eyes and disordered hair, (for I had been told to hasten without delay to receive his bidding, and had consequently no opportunity of effacing the traces of my recent disorder;) I saw standing beside him the Count Caspar Szuniogh. For a moment my step faltered, and my cheek burnt; but the Count, as I entered, extended his hand, and assisted me to a seat; whence I listened

with only half-recovered composure to the tidings of my father. No, Katherine, never—through years of disappointment and despair, through a life of coldness and neglect—have I forgotten the interview of that day. I was told that the proud Lord of Budethin loved me—that the cold and haughty Chief of Szendro sought me for his wife; and so long had my vanity been piqued, my curiosity excited, and my heart enlisted in the cause, that I swooned away as the announcement fell upon my ears. This strange emotion was attributed by both my father and my lover to aversion to the destiny which they had designed for me; and when I recovered consciousness, I found myself supported in the arms of my affrighted parent, who loved me as his own soul; and my hands clasped in both those of the hitherto cold Count Caspar. Bánffy hailed my returning senses with declarations that he left my fate in my own hands; and your father with vows that without me life would thenceforward be a burthen, which he should struggle to shake off. Oh, Katherine, can you doubt how this scene ended? Can you require to be told that I was weak enough to avow my wild and girlish passion?

I became the Count Caspar's wife—and since that hour——”

“Mother! dear mother!” sobbed the maiden.

“More words were needless, my fair girl;” said the Lady of Budethin, whose eye was undimmed by moisture, and whose cheeks burnt with a fever which would have scorched up all tears ere they could have been shed; “I yet live, and you are my child. But it is yourself that I would warn by my recital. Look into your own heart, and tell me that it is not yet too late for you to obey your father's will without repining, should he have already decided on your destiny; for, alas! I fear——”

“Mother, it *is* too late;” broke in Katherine with a flashing eye; “I must be the wife of Francis Forgáts, or I do not ask to live; but surely my father—he who has loved me—will never insist upon the wretchedness of his own child—his *only* one. Oh! no, our fears are idle; and were you to see my suitor, how brave, and beautiful, and gentle!”

“Katherine, you make me tremble;” interposed the Lady; “for I do not dare to hope that Caspar Szuniogh will ever bow his will to yours; and it is

scarcely possible that he has lived on until to-day without deciding on your fate."

"And yet, perhaps——" persisted the fair girl.

"Be this, however, as it may;" resumed the Lady, without heeding the interruption; "we shall soon know the truth; for I dare not, like you, Katherine, brave the vengeance of your father by concealing from him even for an hour a secret so important to his peace. The Saints are my witness!" she added, casting up her fine eyes; "that I have had no secrets of my own to hide, not even that of my misery, which he might have read upon my wasted features, through every day and year of our ill-starred union, had he willed to do so; and yet I shrink and tremble like a culprit to encounter the storm which will burst over us both, when I have told the tale; for too well I know that even should Szuniogh become ultimately reconciled to the suit of the imprudent Forgáts, his anger at the cheat that you have put upon him will be terrible."

"But you think that he *will* relent, dear mother?"

"Mistake me not, Katherine; I neither speculate nor hope. I have long ceased to do either. I

simply offer myself as the mean to divert in part from you the violence of an offended father."

It is strange how sudden and strong a power of resistance and endurance love gives to the young and weak! Only a few days previously, Katherine would have shrunk away in terror from the idea of even the trifling displeasure of her cold stern father; but now, even when she was warned that his wrath was likely to be beyond all bounds, she looked calmly past it in the bright hopefulness of strong affection, and saw only the possible blessing of an union with the man she loved.

A fervent and fond embrace terminated the interview between the mother and child; and then, firm in her duty, though trembling at her heart, the Lady of Budethin sought the presence of her lord.

She had prepared herself for violence; nor could she deny, dearly as she loved her daughter, that the clandestine meetings of the lovers had been not only unjustifiable, but too well calculated to arouse the anger of a proud and harsh spirit like that of Szuniogh. She felt that her task was one of immense difficulty, nor did she dare to excuse the

imprudence of Katherine, lest she should draw down the fury of her husband upon herself.

But she had miscalculated her strength when she believed that she was ready to endure all the outburst of the Count Caspar's rage; for never had she hitherto beheld him so thoroughly transported out of himself. Not satisfied with heaping upon the head of his unhappy daughter the coarsest and the vilest epithets, he next poured forth the vial of his fury upon her unoffending mother; and it was not until he became satisfied that terror was so rapidly paralyzing the senses of the unfortunate lady, that she would shortly be unable to comprehend either his threats or his commands, that he ordered her to return to her wanton daughter, with the information that her hand was already disposed of; that all opposition was as vain as it was dangerous; that he insisted on passive and perfect obedience; and that the love which she had so lightly bestowed upon the first who sought it, must be transferred to the bridegroom whom he had himself chosen; or that it should prove the ruin alike of herself, and of the boy-lover, who had dared to call it forth.

This done, the Count strode from the hall, after

having turned a look upon his wife which drove the blood from her quailing heart ; and after the delay of a few instants, to enable her to obtain some slight controul over her shattered nerves, the unhappy lady tottered back to her own apartment, where she knew that Katherine awaited her.

For a time the poor girl could not comprehend the depth of her misery. She seemed to feel that no fate could separate her from Forgáts; that he would be able to overcome every difficulty ; and it was only by slow degrees that she began to understand the possibility of failure. Despair seized her at the conviction ; and she sank into a fearful state of apathy, whence she was again aroused by a new vision of horror, which had gradually grown into shape upon her mind.

“ But there was more—more, mother, than mere denial—you said something more ;” she uttered slowly and hoarsely ; “ You talked of another bridegroom ; but no, no—he meant me not to believe *that*—he said it only to test my obedience ; only tell me that you are sure he did not mean it ——”

“ Alas my poor child !” sighed the lady, as she

drew the head of the agonized girl to her bosom ; and the accent in which she murmured out the words was so full of hopelessness, that Katherine at once felt that she was answered.

Suddenly she started up. " I can bear this no longer ;" she said wildly ; " I shall go mad if I do not rouse myself to action. I will go instantly to my father ; perhaps he will listen to me, and be moved by my misery. Do not seek to dissuade me ;" she added, as she saw the half fearful and half deprecatory expression of her mother's face ; " He *must* hear me, for am I not his child ?"

And she went ; but it was only to drive the iron deeper into her soul. The rage of the Count Caspar seemed to have obliterated for the instant all memory of the holy tie by which they were bound : and if his ire had fallen fiercely upon his innocent wife, it gathered tenfold strength when he vented it upon its legitimate object. He was a proud man, and his pride was stung ; a stern man, and his authority had been set at nought. For long years he had been accustomed to see all bow before him—and now, the consciousness that he had been bearded by a girl, a child, a

creature dependent upon his pleasure, had lashed him into fury.

But love gave Katherine strength; for the first time she did not shrink, even before this terrible whirlwind of passion. She implored, entreated, and explained; admitted her error, but pleaded the strength of her attachment; and ultimately, unscared by the fearful expression of the face which lowered upon her, with a wild cry of "Father, father, save me!" she flung herself upon his breast.

Not thus, however, was Caspar Szuniogh to be softened. Without the pause of an instant he seized the maiden by her slight waist, and with a frightful curse cast her so rudely from him, that she fell senseless and bleeding against the marble pavement of the hall; and then, without turning a look in that direction, he once more strode away.

We have already alluded to the castle of the Lion-Rock, which commanded the pass at the entrance of the valley of Kissutza. Stephen Fakusits, the lord of that fortress, was an elderly warrior of repute, whose only mistress had throughout life been glory, and his best music the blast of a hostile trumpet. Ever more happy at a fray than at a

feast, women had never been to him of higher importance than any other of those toys which have been invented to amuse the leisure hours of their masters; and as he was not a man who found pleasure in any thing save horses and arms, he had never troubled himself to ask if they could in reality claim a higher place among their fellow mortals. But years had stolen past him unheeded, until he began to find that the silver hairs in his long locks and bushy beard outnumbered those which yet retained their raven dye; and that although he wore his armour with as good a grace as ever, he had become more conscious of its weight; and then it was he first remembered that he was the last of his race, and that should he not take a wife to perpetuate his ancient house, the Counts of Fakusits would terminate in his own person.

For a time the stalwart old soldier “pished!” and “pshawed!” away the recollection whenever it chanced to come across him; but gradually it returned more frequently, and was less easily repulsed; and it came coupled with the annoying reflection, that in order to marry it would be necessary to look out for a wife. This was a worse

dilemma than the first, for Fakusits had so little remarked the female members of the noble families with whom he occasionally associated, that he could not even recollect those among them who had marriageable daughters.

In this difficulty, satisfied that of himself he should never be able to accomplish his object, he resolved to consult his neighbour Caspar Szuniogh ; when suddenly it occurred to him that he might have a daughter of his own, in which case nothing could be more convenient and satisfactory. The family of the Lord of Budethin was as ancient as his own, his reputation as untarnished, his blood as pure ; while on his side he had the advantage of superior wealth, to induce Szuniogh to overlook any discrepancy in age which might possibly exist between himself and his intended bride.

Having progressed thus far in his reflections, it struck him that it might be desirable to ascertain whether, indeed, his neighbour *had* a daughter ; for he seemed to have some vague memory that a splendid festival, at which he had years ago assisted in the castle of Budethin, had been on the occasion of the birth of a child ; but whether boy

or girl he had never hitherto troubled himself to enquire. Now, however, the affair had assumed a more interesting aspect; and although the old Count could not charge his memory with the exact period at which the festival had taken place, he had a strong suspicion that not more than sixteen summers could since have intervened. But this was a matter of too slight importance to occupy the attention of the bluff soldier; and having ascertained from his Castellan, who was more familiar than himself with the interior of the Count Caspar's household, that not only was there an heiress at Budethin, but that she was the beauty of the whole province, his resolution was taken at once; and, without further delay, he dispatched a trusty messenger to the fortress in the valley, charged with a letter, in which he asked of Szuniogh the hand of his daughter in marriage.

Little did any one within those walls suspect the mission of the Count Fakusits' retainer; and thus when he had delivered the missive, and descended to the buttery to refresh himself while he awaited a reply, his talk was but of past onslaughts against the Turks, and hopes of fortunate fields yet to come.

Every stranger was welcome to the retainers of Budethin, for the habits of their lord cut them off from much of that gossipry of good neighbourhood so dear to those of their class ; and it was, consequently, with alacrity, as well as good-will, that the servitors of Szuniogh hastened to perform the offices of hospitality towards their guest.

But if the messenger of the old Count was welcome in the buttery, he was tenfold more so in the hall. The Lord of Budethin had for years maintained an establishment, which, wealthy though he was, was yet so numerous as to be ill-suited to his resources. He knew, also, that the castle of the Lion-stone must prove to him either a firm, or a formidable, neighbour ; and, like the chief who held it, he never dreamt for an instant of putting the will of a mere woman in competition with the expediency of such a measure as that which was here proposed. In a word, his reply was written ; and when it reached the Count Stephen Fakusits, he found himself the accepted suitor of the beautiful Katherine Szuniogh.

It was only a week after this event, that the scene of misery which we have already described

as consequent on the Count Caspar's knowledge of his daughter's attachment, turned the castle of Budethin into a house of mourning; nor was the anguish of Forgáts, when he learnt through a confidential servant the state of affairs, less poignant than that of his mistress. Conscious that he had not been altogether blameless in gaining her affections without the knowledge and sanction of her father, and distracted at the idea of losing her for ever, even while he was far from suspecting that she was promised to another, he became wild with despair; and a thousand vague and impossible schemes suggested themselves to his excited spirit only to be abandoned.

The temper of the Lord of Budethin was a proverb in the country; and thence he felt, at once, that from him he had no hope; for had he not cursed his child!—she whose innocence and loveliness should have screened her alike from harshness and from suffering. All that he could do, in the first burst of his agony, was to send back, in return for her miserable intelligence, a deep vow of unalterable constancy, and the assurance that, come what might, he never would abandon the hope of one day calling her his own.

A few miserable days wore by; and Katherine, stunned by her heavy fall, and crushed beneath the consciousness of her father's curse, was seated in her chamber, absorbed in her own misery, and reckless of all around her, when the stir within the castle, and the blast of the warder's horn, announced the arrival of some expected guest; but the poor girl heard neither the hurry of the passing steps, nor the hoarse breath of the warning trumpet; nor was she aroused from her reverie of pain, until the touch of her mother's hand, and the sound of her low sad voice close to her ear, awoke her to the consciousness of external objects.

"Rouse yourself, my poor child!" she said; "for you have a fearful trial to go through. I dare not withhold my message, for I am come at your father's bidding—You have heard the blast of the horn upon the watch-tower?"

"I have heard nothing," was the cold reply.

"It announced a guest"—pursued the unhappy mother: "He comes to you, Katherine."

"Is it a priest, to prepare me for the burying?"

"Alas! my daughter, I fear that he is one

whose errand will be even less welcome. It is your destined bridegroom."

"Mother;" said the maiden, turning towards her a cheek as pale and almost as cold as marble; "Do not mock me—I am no longer a child—I have lived years in one short week—I am a wretched thing, withering beneath a father's curse—Leave me to my misery!"

"Would that I dared to do so!" said the lady; "but the will of the Count Caspar is imperative; You must bind up your hair, my Katherine, and follow me to the hall. Such were your father's words."

"How!" exclaimed the wretched girl, rendered desperate by the anguish of her spirit. "Did he not cast me from him? fling me off like a noxious reptile? and leave me, bruised and bleeding upon the earth? And does he think, because for my misery he is my father, that, therefore, I too am callous to all feeling, and to be summoned back by a word like a stricken hound, to be again chastised at his good pleasure? Return not to his presence, mother, but send some other messenger; for this day I will not pass the threshold of my chamber!"

“Katherine—let me implore—let me beseech you ——”

“No more, mother, if you would have me preserve my reason.”

“Do you not yet know your father?” persisted the bewildered and terrified lady.

“Do I yet know him?” echoed the cold voice of the maiden. “Think you that I can still mistake his nature? It is *because* I know him that I persist in my resolve. Has he not spurned and cursed me? And do you ask me if I know him *now*?”

“Remember, Katherine, that your father’s will is absolute; and that he will never withdraw his plighted word.”

“Be it so;” said the maiden, with the same reckless composure; “If he has sworn that I shall be the bride of the man now beneath his roof, be he whom he may, for I seek not to learn his name—the whole world are alike hateful to me—I must obey him, for I have no power to resist; but until the day of my betrothal comes, he shall not look on me.”

All further words were needless; and convinced by the cold composure of the maiden that she

would, now that her spirit had been roused by suffering, prove as determined as her father, the Lady of Budethin reluctantly retired from the apartment; and profited by her suggestion to plead sudden indisposition, and excuse through one of her women her daughter's non-appearance.

Though anger swelled at his heart, the Count was fain to make a jest of Katherine's absence, for he was far too politic to allow the suitor to believe that his commands were set at nought. He therefore spoke lightly of the weaknesses of the sex, whose conventionalisms must be respected; and appointed an early day for the betrothal, in order to compensate Fakusits for present disappointment. The concession was, however, needless; for the worthy old warrior had driven himself to matrimony as a measure of expediency; and having ascertained that all difficulties had been smoothed before him, deemed it a matter of perfect indifference whether he were introduced to his bride on the present occasion, or at the foot of the altar.

Fortunate was it, both for Katherine and her unhappy mother, that Fakusits, anxious to make this, his first venture, terminate his attempts at possess-

ing himself of a fitting helpmate, acquiesced so readily in all the propositions and arrangements of his haughty neighbour, that when the midnight watch had been relieved, and that both the nobles, who had drunk deep, separated on the drawbridge, the father to withdraw to the solitude of his chamber, and the suitor, followed by a score of his retainers, to regain the fortress of the Lion Rock, the Count Caspar was so well satisfied with the termination of the negociation, that he retired to rest without bestowing a single bitter thought on the new delinquency of his unhappy daughter; nor did he from that hour until the day of betrothal, which was fixed for the following week, give a single sign that he remembered her existence.

The maiden, meanwhile, lived on from day to day in the fond hope that she should receive tidings of Francis Forgáts; but time wore away, and the morning at length arrived which to her was to be big with fate. At day-dawn a packet from her father was put into her hands by her faithful attendant Irla, in which she was warned that immediately before the sunset meal she would be affianced to the Count Stephen Fakusits.

“ The hour is then arrived !” she murmured to herself, as the paper fell from her nerveless fingers ; “ I have no news of Forgáts, and I am to become the wife of the old man of the mountain-fortress. Be it so. Better the stern warrior, than some gay ruffler at the Court. I shall be left to die in peace in my native province. The game will be soon played out ; and earth is wide enough to find a grave for all !”

It was a weary morning. The Lady of Budethin passed it on her knees, and thus, perhaps, was the happiest inmate of the castle ; the handmaidens wept ; Irla, in particular, was inconsolable ; but Katherine had neither tear nor sigh to spare. She looked as though she had been suddenly stricken into marble ; and when, as the day fell, she was summoned to the hall, and that her mother for the first time since the preceding evening entered her apartment, to conduct her to the presence of her father and his guests, she involuntarily bent her head before her, so majestic and so beautiful was her despair.

Not a trace of weakness was upon her cheek ; not the slightest moisture upon her long dark eye-lashes ; but a cold passionless spirit of en-

duration sat upon her brow, and a resolute determination sparkled in her restless glance. Her long hair was looped with jewels, and her full purple robe was confined about her waist with a belt of pearls. She had gems upon her arms and on her bosom, and the light flashed over them as she moved along; but her complexion was as white as the moonshine that rests upon a sepulchre; and to those who had known her, ere sorrow fell on her young heart, she looked like the spectre of her former self.

As she entered the hall, leaning on the arm of her mother, Szuniogh rose from his seat, and advancing a few paces towards her took her hand, and raised it to his lips; but as he performed this act of courtesy, he grasped it so tightly between his nervous fingers, that the blood started under the pressure; and he looked keenly into the face of the fair girl to read if she had understood his meaning. In her present mood of mind, however, Katherine was beyond all fear; and it was with a sensation of wonder that her father led her on, and seated her between himself and a sturdy warrior many years his senior, whom he presented

to her as her accepted suitor. Katherine turned one look on the glittering mass of armour beside her; for the old soldier, in order to do honour to the occasion, was armed *cap-à-pié*; and then suffering her eyes to wander listlessly over the assembled revellers, she ultimately fixed them on the arched entrance at the lower end of the hall, as though she momentarily anticipated the advent of some unbidden guest. But she looked in vain; the ceremony of betrothment took place, rings were exchanged, the bridegroom sturdily saluted his affianced bride, and a sumptuous banquet wound up the business of the day.

Not a word had passed the lips of the wretched girl since she had invoked a blessing on her mother in the sacredness of her own chamber; and as she sat beside the colossal Lord of the Lion Rock, who, sheathed in steel, and draining deep draughts of Tokayer and Cyprus wine, was rapidly forgetting the errand which had brought him to Budethin on that particular occasion; there were few in the circle that surrounded her who read the history of a broken heart in the blanched cheek, and livid lip before them.

Forgáts, when the intelligence of Katherine's betrothal reached him, heard it with the same feeling which may be supposed to belong to one unjustly condemned for a crime of which he is innocent, but who is aware of the enmity of his judges. To see her once more—to embrace her for the last time—and then to lose his life under the scymetar of the Infidel, was now his only hope ; and the same means which he had found available to secure his first interview with the beautiful victim, did not fail him when he sought to obtain his last.

All things having been prepared by his agents within the castle, a light fishing-boat hired from a peasant in the valley, soon brought the adventurous lover about midnight to the foot of the lofty tower, which, protected by the Wáag at its base, contained the apartments of the ladies of the family. A rope-ladder, prepared by one of their attendants who had been bribed rather by pity than by gold, swung from the casement of an ante-room connected with the chamber of Katherine ; and ere many moments had elapsed she was in his arms.

They had no time to squander in alarms : they once more beheld each other, and for a time were

happy ; but Forgáts could not forget that they were standing on the verge of a volcano ; and he urged immediate flight, vowing a thousand vows of unalterable affection and enduring truth.

Katherine, half persuaded, resisted faintly. The thought of her mother alone made her pause. The prospect was alluring ; under her father's roof all was tyranny and harshness, while Forgáts offered to her acceptance a home of peace and love. She had already begun to yield, when Irla rushed into the room exclaiming, " We are betrayed ! "

A kiss on the pale lips of the swooning Katherine, and a spring through the open window, were all that were left to the unhappy Forgáts. Already the glare of the torches borne by his enemies appeared near the threshold of the chamber ; and the fierce voice of Szuniogh, breathing frightful vengeance against both his child and her lover, fell upon his ear ; while so dreadful were his denunciations of Katherine, that Forgáts could no longer controul his passion ; and re-ascending the ladder upon which he had paused to listen to the advancing steps of the furious father, he would again have sprung into the room ; but as he laid his hand upon

the frame of the casement, it was hurriedly closed against him by Irla; and the attendant whom he had left in the boat, seizing him with a nervous clutch, forced him down the ladder; and having grasped the oars pushed the little bark from the shore, and drove it into the full stream of the current.

Like an infuriate animal rushed the Count Caspar upon his daughter. His naked weapon was in his hand, and his eyes glared with passion. "Wanton and vile!" he hissed from between his clenched teeth, as he grasped her by the arm with such rude violence that she writhed beneath it; "Is it thus that you dishonour the name of Szuniogh? Is this, the castle of your ancestors, to be made the trysting-place of your unhallowed meetings? My first thought was to slay you; but I dare not pollute my weapon with so foul a victim. You would have covered the disgrace of the house of Fakusits with the veil of night—have lorded it in the proud halls of the Lion Rock with a lie upon your lips, and a shadow on your spirit—But this was not to be—I am, at least, spared this last disgrace. The gray-haired husband is not to be the thing of shame

you would have made him. But enough of you, and of your vileness—You have cumbered the earth too long already. And now, hark ye, sirrahs!" he added, turning towards the trembling vassals who were clustered about the door of the apartment awaiting the catastrophe which each felt was but too certain to ensue, although they could not guess its nature; "Away with her to the castle vaults — there are narrow lodgings there which will scarcely accommodate at once her and her paramour! Why do you stand staring upon me thus? Am I one to be disobeyed?"

Too well did those whom he addressed know that beyond his will there was no appeal; his power over the destiny of his daughter was undoubted; and although there were many among them who loved the wretched girl as though she had been of their own kin, there was not one who dared withstand the authority of his Suzerain.

As yet the actual intention of the Count did not appear to have struck any of his followers; or, if one or two among them had for a moment entertained a suspicion of the frightful truth, they had instantly spurned it as too horrible for reality; and

it would have seemed as though the miserable victim herself had been equally ignorant of his meaning ; for she unresistingly obeyed his bidding when he motioned her to follow him, her thoughts dwelling upon the escape of Forgáts, and her heart putting up prayers for his safety ; nor was it until they stood within the gloomy dungeons which lie below the bed of the Wáag, and that she heard the voice of her father command that bread and water sufficient to sustain nature during a period of three days, as well as pickaxes and shovels should be immediately procured, that she began to have a horrid foreboding of his intention, and of her own fate !

Had he told her that she could never again look upon the face of Francis Forgáts, she would have welcomed death as a blessed deliverance from a weary and hopeless existence, for life to her would then have been worthless ; but just as she had felt his breath upon her brow, listened to his fond voice, and began once more to hope—to see so terrible, so horrible a death prepared for her—Without warning, and without preparation, to be cast into the grave, sentient and struggling !—no wonder that her woman-nature once more gave way, and that she

sank at the feet of her unnatural father in a state of partial insensibility.

Around the vault in which they stood was a succession of niches, left at intervals in the solid walls of the building, in each of which stood a large mass of stone forming a rude seat; and having on the right hand a sort of inner hollow containing a shelf, produced in the same primitive manner, and sufficiently spacious to contain a pitcher of water, and a large loaf of bread. The purpose of these inhuman dungeons could not be for a moment misunderstood, even if there had not been piled at the entrance of each a number of large stones hewn into shape, and evidently prepared to close the living graves near which they were deposited.

While the messengers of the Count Caspar were absent on their sinful errand, the silence of the grave reigned throughout the dungeon. Katherine still lay on the damp earth where she had cast herself; and her father stood beside her leaning upon his naked weapon, and looking as stern and as impassive as the rocky walls by which he was surrounded. Not a sound fell on the ear save the lashing of the wild waves that fretted and foamed

against the foundations of the castle, and which were rioting above their heads ; nor even after their return into the vaults did any material change take place in the position of the principal group.

A wave of the hand indicated to the creatures of his will the grave which Szuniogh had selected for his daughter. The bread and water were accordingly deposited reluctantly and lingeringly within it ; nor was it until the great weight of the stones required to close up the recess sent their hollow echoes through the vast subterranean, as they were with difficulty moved into their places, that the wretched girl awakened to a full sense of her coming trial. But when she at length did so, a shriek so wild and shrill that it seemed to ring through the solid masonry, and for an instant to still the tumult of the choking waters, filled the vault, as she bounded from the earth, and throwing back her dishevelled hair, glared wildly and distractedly around her.

“Tell me that I dream”—she yelled out in a voice so terrible that it seemed no longer to be human ; “I am so young, so innocent—Life is so strong within me—I shall linger there—*there*—in that hideous grave, until I feed on my own flesh, and

demons come, and mock me. Men! Monsters! Is there not one of you who wears a sword? Not one of you who fears a woman's curse? I tell you that I cannot die, wrapped in that shroud of stone—I must have earth upon me—earth, and the blessed sunshine. I shall live there for ever—mad—*mad!*”

As she howled out the last sentence, another signal from Szuniogh, who had looked on unmoved at the frantic agony of his daughter, and who discovered that the masonry had now reached a height which rendered it necessary that she should be at once placed in her living grave in order that it might be closed for ever—another and an imperative signal warned his creatures to seize their victim; and she felt herself suddenly grasped by strong hands; but she broke away from them with a power borrowed from the state of insanity to which she had been urged; and with a spring like that of a wild animal bounded beyond their reach.

None who were present ever forgo that awful midnight. Urged by their furious master, the indignant vassals were compelled to commence a chase, at which the demons must have made merry. Rendered desperate; partially maddened from

terror; and temporarily endued with superhuman strength; the wretched girl swept through the recesses of the vault, pursued by a score of armed and powerful men; now lost in the obscurity of the subterranean, and again betrayed by her white dress, as the light of the torches flashed upon it; standing for a brief instant at bay to regain her struggling breath; and then once more darting forward with a wild yell that seemed as though her spirit must escape upon its breath. But this disproportionate and unnatural race could not endure for ever; and at length the maiden sank down with the blood gushing from her mouth and nostrils, and tracing characters of vengeance upon her snowy drapery.

In this extremity she became an easy victim. Senseless and unresisting, she was lifted into the niche, and placed upon the cold and narrow seat; but each of those who helped to place her there muttered in an undertone a prayer for forgiveness to his patron saint, ere he turned away with a sick heart, and a throbbing pulse!

In a few moments all was silent in that place of crime. The last stone had been adjusted; the last

command obeyed; and all save one felt as they left the dungeon-vault that they had another heavy crime upon their souls.

And where was the fond mother while this cruel tragedy was enacting? Sleeping calmly in her velvet-draped bed, dreaming of her child. Once she was startled from her slumber by a strange wild sound, which seemed to her half-sleeping ear like the frantic yell of human agony; but she soon stilled the beating of her heart with the reflection that this could not be; and having breathed a prayer for preservation against all evil spirits, and blessings on her suffering daughter, she closed her heavy eyes and slept again.

Her waking was one of terror; for Irla, the beloved attendant of Katherine, having recovered from the deep faint into which she had been thrown by the violent scene enacted in the chamber of her mistress, no sooner regained possession of her senses than she hurried to the bedside of the wretched mother. At such a moment every form of etiquette was banished; and the Lady rose eagerly from her pillow to listen to the dark narration of the waiting-woman. But alas! Irla had continued too long

insensible to leave room for the faintest hope that any interference might now avail, even had the wife of the Count Caspar been possessed of influence to sway the actions of her lord; and thus the two miserable and anxious women could only weep and bewail themselves, until the quick ear of the girl caught the sound of stealthy footsteps in the gallery; and venturing from the chamber to learn what they might portend, heard from the lips of a young vassal to whom she was affianced, the history of the midnight tragedy.

Maddened by the recital, Irla waited not to thank her lover for the solicitude which had induced him to brave the anger of his fierce lord, in order to assure himself of her safety; but after having heard that the Count had closed the dungeon with his own hand, and borne away the keys, she rushed back into the presence of the Lady; and sinking on her knees, buried her face in the tapestried coverlet, and gasped out her tale.

A pang, such as no words can portray, struck to the mother's heart. She had then heard the dying yell of her child! It was a thought too terrible to bear; and when next Irla addressed her, she had lost the power to reply.

On the morrow all was grief and consternation throughout the castle ; for it was only in the presence of their lord that the retainers kept up a decent show of composure. When they were beyond his observation, there was not one who did not shed bitter tears for the fair and innocent victim ; but, even in the midst of her first burst of anguish, Irla did better ; for she dispatched the accustomed messenger to Forgáts to acquaint him with the fate of his unhappy mistress ; and Szuniogh had scarcely intimated to his miserable wife that for the remainder of her days she must remain a close prisoner in her own apartments as the guilty accomplice of her child's disgrace, and never again venture to appear before him—a command which filled her spirit with the first sensation of gratitude that he had ever awakened within it—ere the Count Forgáts was already preparing to deliver her whom he mourned.

His duty lay plainly traced out before him—He must rescue Katherine at any risk of life and liberty—It was for him that she had suffered ; and a shudder came over him as he remembered that he might be even now too late ! She was so young,

so gentle; and what must be her terror in such a position? He did not dare to pursue the ghastly images which rose before him as if to answer the appeal; nor had he time to waste his moments in inactive speculation. He loved the maiden with a passion as deep and fervent as her own; and the danger of the enterprise which he meditated for her deliverance only enhanced his impatience to undertake it. He accordingly assembled his followers; and having told them all the story of his love and its unnatural consequence, he warned them of the demoniacal character of the Count Caspar; and then bade only those who cared to risk his vengeance in order to revenge their lord, move to his side in token that they were willing to share his fortunes.

The first feeling of happiness that the young Count had known since the betrothal of Katherine, he was fated to experience at that moment; for the words had scarcely escaped his lips ere he found all his vassals to a man standing beside him, and the space vacant on which they had been marshalled, when he prepared to address them. Energetically did he thank them, and declare that their devotion

inspired him with renewed hope ; and then, bidding each man take what rest he might require until sunset, he informed them that at that hour he should commence his march, in order to reach the fortress of Budethin at midnight.

Meanwhile the affectionate Irla had not been idle. Prepared for the attempt of Forgáts, she had won over the warder to his interest ; and by the assistance of her lover secured the neutrality of a great portion of the garrison ; who, when they were once convinced that the preservation of the Lady Katherine, and her deliverance from the power of her unnatural father, were the sole views of the young Count, consented to make merely a decent show of resistance, but by no means to impede his success.

Unconscious that the way had been thus judiciously and effectively cleared for him, Forgáts on the stroke of midnight presented himself at the gate, which was immediately and silently opened ; and while a few weapons were unsheathed, and a few menaces uttered by some of the guard, the remainder affected to be buried in sleep, or openly acknowledged that their hearts were in his cause.

Having gained the principal gallery, Forgáts

at once began to descend a wide flight of stone steps which he justly concluded would lead him towards the dungeons; but in order to discover their entrance he was compelled to apply to one of the Count Szuniogh's retainers.

It could not have chanced more favourably; for his enquiry was addressed to one of the very individuals who had assisted to deposit the wretched girl in her miserable grave, and had not ventured since that hour to close his eyes after his first attempt at sleep, so frightful were the visions which had haunted his pillow; and who consequently hailed his appearance as that of a good spirit, who might, in saving the wretched Katherine, free himself from the nocturnal terrors by which he was now enthralled.

The path once ascertained, all obstacles gave way before the impassioned eagerness of Forgáts. The plated door opening upon the dungeons, which might have seemed impassable to a less determined adventurer, reluctantly yielded before the strokes of his good battle-axe; and entrance once gained into the vault, the narrow prison of Katherine was destroyed as if by magic; and the still insensible girl, wrapped in her ensanguined robe, clasped in the arms of her lover.

The noise occasioned by the battering down of the dungeon door, and the demolition of the solid masonry behind which the Lady Katherine was entombed, had, however, fallen on the quick ears of the Count Caspar; who, springing from his sleepless bed, summoned about him all those of his followers who were at hand; and gathering strength and numbers as he approached the great hall of the fortress, he found himself in time to attack Francis Forgáts, who was rapidly making his way to the portal with his unconscious daughter in his arms.

The vassals of the lover were all good men and true; and so many flung themselves between Szuniogh and the rescued girl, while the blows of his own followers fell so unfortunately, that Forgáts, fighting his way with the pale Katherine hanging upon his shoulder, succeeded in springing upon his horse which was there awaiting him; and followed by a party of his retainers, the remainder lingering behind to protect his retreat; he succeeded in escaping from Budethin, and the blows and threats of its exasperated lord.

The incredible report of Katherine's dreadful

fate had also travelled with the dawn to the Lion Rock; and Stephen Fakusits, indignant that any father should dare to use violence towards a maiden under betrothal to himself, and aghast at a tale which to his simple and honest nature appeared to be the mere invention of a distempered brain, resolved to learn the truth from the lips of Szuniogh himself. At dawn he accordingly set forth; and had scarcely ridden half an hour, when in the narrow pass of the Oblazow mountain, he came upon a party of horsemen, in the midst of whom rode a lady, who from exhaustion could scarcely keep the saddle.

Deciding from this circumstance that he had encountered some bold ravisher who was bearing off a noble maiden against her will, all the knight-errantry of the brave old soldier rushed to his heart; and he instantly resolved to deliver the lady, be she who she might. Giving no opportunity of parley therefore, he set spurs to his horse; and followed by his vassals, to whom an adventure was always welcome, forthwith attacked the handsome young noble who supported the lady in her seat, and who was evidently the commander of the party.

No words can express his rage, however, when as Forgáts wheeled aside his horse to escape a blow, the bright light of the rising sun flashed for a moment upon the face of the maiden, and Fakusits recognised in the fair fugitive his affianced bride.

In an instant he rushed upon the unhappy lover with a violence, which young, powerful, and active as he was, might well have called forth all the energies of Forgáts, even had he been untrammelled ; but encumbered as he was with the lady, whom he had also to protect against the onslaught of his enemy, the combat was as brief as it was furious. Fakusits had no burthen to support, no precious charge to guard ; and while his followers fell on the retainers of the young noble, his well-aimed and heavy blows soon made the youth reel in his saddle, and ultimately brought him to the earth. But even as he fell he clutched the insensible girl with a grasp of iron, nor did he in death relax his hold ; and Katherine lay beside him as pale and apparently as lifeless as himself.

When they saw their Lord extended on the earth, with his shivered weapon in one hand, and

his other arm wound about the maiden, the vassals of Forgáts became mad to revenge his defeat; nor was it until two of them had shared the fate of their leader that the authoritative command of Fakusits put an end to the useless conflict; who, on alighting from his horse, and raising the head of Katherine upon his arm, and discovering that although stunned by the fall she yet breathed, coldly consigned her to the care of one of his attendants, and retraced his steps to his own castle, where his unexpected re-appearance, so strangely accompanied, created no small surprise.

The party travelled slowly from the moment that it commenced its retrograde movement; and while one sturdy swordsman supported the lady before him in the saddle, another walked beside her to render such aid as might be required; and the comparative ease which this arrangement afforded to the poor fugitive recalled her scattered energies, and enabled her, on their arrival at the Lion Rock, to recognise Fakusits as he assisted her to dismount.

The brow of the old warrior was dark, his mood stern, and his demeanour as cold as was compatible with his character of host.

“Not thus, lady;” he said, as she leaned heavily upon him in her progress to the hall; “did I look to welcome you to my hearth; nor do I even now know in what manner, or to whom, I am to offer greeting. If as my affianced wife, why are you here, a detected fugitive?—If as the light-o’-love of Francis Forgáts——”

That name at once broke the spell of the heavy lethargy by which the wretched girl had been so long enthralled; and with a heart-rending groan she flung herself at the feet of the bewildered noble, and looked up earnestly into his face. “What of *him*? What of Forgáts?” she exclaimed wildly; “Where is my deliverer from that worse than death—that living grave in which they had entombed me? I seem to have some horrid memory, clouding my spirit like an evil dream! Tell me—only tell me that he lives——”

“I will not cheat you with a lie;” said Fakusits; “He fell under my sword. But think of yourself, maiden; for if all that I have heard, and that your own words imply, be indeed true, you will need a defender even in your guilt; and never shall it be said that Stephen Fakusits abandoned a woman to

the misery which his arm could avert from her helplessness."

"Count!" cried the Lady Katherine, rising proudly from her knees, the implied suspicion of her affianced husband having banished for a moment even the memory of her lost lover; "I forgive you for the doubt—the pang to which you have subjected me—for I have indeed no right to hope that when my father—he who has watched me from my infancy—has branded me with guilt, others will deem me innocent. And yet I swear to you, in the name of the Blessed Mary, that I am as pure as when he first took me from my mother's arms. Oh, wherefore did you bring this ruin down upon me by seeking to make me your bride, when my heart had been vowed to another?"

"How say you, Lady?" asked Fakusits in his turn; "Mean you that when your father promised me your hand he knew that Forgáts loved you? Did he play me false, when he told me that you had never listened to any other vows?"

"If he indeed pledged himself to so foul a falsehood, then is he forsworn!" said the maiden; "And now—now that you have destroyed the only hear

that loved me, whither am I to turn for refuge? Yet, no, no;" she continued wildly; "there is indeed one other, my wretched mother, but she, like myself, is persecuted and powerless."

"Katherine of Budethin;" said the old soldier solemnly; "lay your hand in mine, and swear to me that it is even as you say. As my affianced wife you owe me this concession. Swear, and on my side, I pledge myself by the honour of a soldier to put all faith in your assurance."

"Now the Saints be praised!" said the maiden, as she stretched forth her small hand, and laid it in the ample palm of her host; "Gratefully and fervently do I swear that these lips have never yet been tainted by untruth."

"'Tis well;" murmured the old chief, who for the first time in his life found himself moved by the tears and beauty of a woman; "then never will I abandon you, save at your own bidding, to the blind fury of your reckless father. Remember, Katherine, that you are my wife in the eyes of both heaven and earth, and that thus you may dwell beneath my roof in all honour and reverence; nor shall you ever have reason to repent your trust.

Decide, therefore, your own destiny. If you abide here, you shall live unmolested as it may best please you ; and I will surround you with women, and with respect ; trusting to time and to your own heart——”

“ Oh, spare me the rest, noble and generous Fakusits !” exclaimed the maiden, as she buried her face in her spread hands, and burst into a passionate paroxysm of grief ; “ I accept with thanks and blessings your offer of protection ; for, alas ! I dare not again trust myself to the power of the Count Caspar ; but never, never, can either time or gratitude, even deep as mine will be, induce me to become the wife of *his* murderer !”

“ Nay, Katherine ;” said Fakusits mildly, though the blood leapt to his cheek and brow as she spoke ; “ Do not misjudge me in your turn. Had your ill-fated lover put faith in my chivalry, and confided to me the tale of your ill-starred passion, never would I have stood between you and your happiness. I had not then seen you, Lady ; and mine has not been a life of silken dalliance, of which your weak sex made the charm. For me, the daughter of Szuniogh, when I asked her in marriage, possessed

no charm potent enough to bend me to dishonour; and thus the ill-timed stroke which smote your chosen suitor was one of misconception, not of pre-meditated wrong."

"But it destroyed him"—murmured the wretched girl amid her sobs.

"Alas! for that evil there is no remedy;" sighed Fakusits; "And now, fair Katherine, are we agreed that should your father, as assuredly he will when the tidings of the night's adventure reach him, come hither to demand you at my hands, I have your sanction to withhold compliance?"

"Oh, if indeed you would save me from death—from worse, far worse than death!" was the reply of the maiden, as she wrung her hands in terror; "Abandon me not! I trust to you—I cling to you—for, alas! I have no other hope! Had you beheld that frightful chase, when in the dark vault which they sought to make my grave, they pursued me with outstretched arms over the rugged earth, while he who should have saved me stood by, and urged them on—Is it not strange that they did not hunt me into madness? Oh, save me, save me, as

you are a knight and a soldier, from a renewal of that hideous hour!"

"Calm yourself, Katherine;" said her host; "Henceforward I will have no will but yours; no law save your good pleasure. I know not how, but I feel that you have made a child of me amid my gray hairs; and, on the word of a Magyar, no father, were he ten thousand Szunioghs, shall ever bear you hence in my despite. And now I will intrude on you no longer. You have need of rest and gentle tendance, and to both will I consign you; with a solemn pledge not to venture again into your presence until summoned by yourself."

"How shall I repay such gallant service!" sobbed the grateful and excited girl.

"As you may yourself hereafter deem most fitting," said the old noble, ere he left her to the repose which she so much needed.

When the Lord of the Lion Rock retired from the presence of his affianced wife, he passed out of the fortress, and bent his steps to the eastern rampart. All nature lay steeped in sunshine, for time had glided by imperceptibly, and it was now high noon; but a brighter glow, even than that on which he

looked, was over the spirit of the old warrior. For the first time he felt the influence of beauty and of tears ; he could not disguise from himself that, even while he rejoiced that he had no longer a rival, he could almost have wished his strong right arm had failed, ere it should have been himself who struck him down—for Katherine loved him ! Katherine, the loveliest creature upon whom his eyes had ever rested. She who was now beneath his roof—dependent on his protection—and whom, could he but win her to his heart, he felt that he could cherish like a child, as well as honour as a wife. A strange change had come over the spirit of the stern old soldier ; and he thanked his patron saint that, even although she never might be his, she was yet near him, and trusted to him.

There was a beautiful and an unselfish generosity blent with the sudden passion of Fakusits, which made it not only respectable, but almost sublime ; and throughout the lengthened musing in which he indulged, as he paced to and fro the rampart, he sought rather how he might secure the comfort and restore the peace of the unhappy girl, than how he could further his own interests. “ End as it may ;”

he murmured to himself, as he turned towards the hall, whither he had been summoned to take his place at the noontide meal; "if she be not my wife, I will have none other; and old Stephen Fakusits will be the last of his line."

Darkness came, and the persecuted Katherine still slept the deep sleep of exhaustion, when the warder's horn announced the approach of strangers. As Fakusits had anticipated, it was the Count Caspar come to claim his daughter; which he did with such discourteous threats as to make the heart of the old knight leap to his throat.

As, on the one hand, the infuriated father had refused to enter the castle; and the Count Stephen, on the other, equally declined quitting it in order to receive him, the two Magnates met on the draw-bridge; and the glare of the pine torches borne by the attendants, lit up into still more unnatural lividness the pale and working features of the baffled Lord of Budethin, whose passion almost choked his utterance; while Fakusits, strong in a sense of right, looked calmly on, until the violent language of his visitor aroused him in his turn to frenzy.

The errand of Szuniogh was bootless; to all his

declarations that he had full power over his daughter, whom he had condemned to die, and who should abide her fate, the old knight retorted that Katherine of Budethin was his affianced wife—that his honour was satisfied by the death of Forgáts; and that of the innocence of the lady herself he was so thoroughly convinced, that he would never wed another. That, moreover, the Count Caspar had forfeited all authority over her future fate by the hellish crime of which he had been guilty; and that, in fine, the maiden should remain an inmate of the Lion Rock, as she herself had willed to do, at all risks, and braving all results. And having so said, the gallant old soldier turned upon his heel, and re-entered the castle; leaving his now declared enemy foaming with rage, and maddened by his failure.

Days and weeks wore by, and the Count Fakusits remained faithful to his pledge; although he returned from every interview with his gentle inmate more enamoured than before. The deep and close mourning in which Katherine had shrouded herself, was only too typical of her stricken heart and broken spirit; while it formed so strange a contrast with her pure and childlike beauty, that had she

sought to enhance her loveliness, she could have adopted no fitter garb.

As she became accustomed to the presence and society of her host, she was soothed by his consolations, and strengthened by his example. She knew that, like herself, he was suffering all the pangs of bitter disappointment and regret ; but no word of passion, or of reproach, ever passed his lips ; and while she felt that she could never love again, for that her heart was in the grave of Francis Forgáts, she could not withhold from the Count Stephen her admiration and her respect.

Things were in this state, when to her great joy, as she sat alone in her chamber, buried in gloomy retrospection, her affectionate Irla one day suddenly rushed into her presence ; and throwing herself at her feet, embraced her knees, and gave way to all the extravagance of a wild and frantic delight. Her simple tale was soon told. She had escaped from Budethin, where, since the departure of Katherine, she had attached herself to the service of the Lady Susanna, whose captivity and persecutions she had voluntarily shared ; but who was now subjected to such unnatural harshness, that it had been con-

cluded between them, that her only chance of partial emancipation from her husband's tyranny lay in the consent of her daughter to give her hand to Fakusits, and thus secure a powerful protector.

Great was the struggle in the breast of Katherine. She did not seek to blind herself to the many noble qualities of the man who had become, in the truest sense of the word, her benefactor; but she could not forget that, although inadvertently, or through misapprehension, he had slain the beloved one for whom she would willingly have resigned her own existence.

At length, however, the tears of Irla, the thought of her mother's wretchedness, rendered deeper and more hopeless through her own agency; and the consciousness, that although he well knew the errand of the affectionate waiting-woman, Fakusits, with a delicacy which she could not but appreciate, nevertheless forbode to urge his claim, failed not to produce their effect; and the daughter of Szuniogh, although still shrinking and reluctant, eventually consented to become the wife of the Count Stephen; whose age she solaced by her gentleness, and whose generosity she repaid by her duty and devotion.

From thenceforward there was feud between the two castles of Budethin and the Lion Rock. Centuries have since passed by ; and of the lofty towers of the former, one only now remains erect ; the ditch has been long dry, and was lately converted into an English garden, bright with flowers, and shady with waving boughs. The unnatural monument of a father's cruelty is still to be seen among the ruins ; where the peasants of the neighbourhood point out to the curious stranger, the narrow niche in which the Lady Katherine passed a night of terror. The family of the Counts of Szuniogh intermarried with the warlike and powerful knights of Podmanin ; but the race became finally extinct at the end of the last century.

The castle and territory of Budethin then passed into the possession of the Count Stephen Csáky, who rebuilt a great portion of the edifice, and made it the abode of taste and luxury.

Of the fortress of the Lion Rock nothing now remains save a mass of shapeless ruins ; having so utterly thrown off all trace of human ingenuity, that, as the traveller gazes upward from the valley, he can no longer distinguish anything save the

rugged and picturesque outline of the mountain, gleaming cold and white against the blue background of the sky; and looking as though the foot of man had never intruded on its solitary grandeur.

CHAPTER V.

THE tale was told, and the voice of M. Karolyi died away into a silence, which remained unbroken during several minutes; for he had so thoroughly succeeded in exciting the interest of his auditors, that they could not immediately shake off the spell by which they had been enthralled.

Time had meanwhile stolen on; and the deep tones of the clock upon the gate-tower tolled midnight just as the party were beginning to recover their wonted spirits. It was too late to resume the amusement of narration; but the offer of another guest to give them on the morrow a legend of the Podmanins, to whom allusion had been made by M. Karolyi, was eagerly accepted, for it linked more closely together the chain of the past; and while the ladies entreated, that if there were a heroine to the story which they were next to hear, they might be spared such horrors as those to which they had just listened: the gentlemen on their side were equally anxious that examples of tyrannical

vanity might not be multiplied ; and that they should not be introduced to a second Caspar Szuniogh.

Further discussion was prevented by the host, who summoned the younger portion of his guests to the dance, and the elder to the midnight meal ; and then the conversation turned, as if by general consent, upon the probable chance that the thaw might recommence on the morrow ; and as the “ good night ” passed from mouth to mouth, it was in most instances coupled with this hope.

But the goddess with the sheeny wings proved inexorable. The frost-spirit amused himself until dawn with tracing upon the window-panes those delicate and mysterious designs, in which the eye of fancy can distinguish almost every object in the creation, so minutely and intangibly produced, as to seem the emanations of a fairy’s wand, or the pencillings of some earth-descended star ; and when the earliest of the watchers looked forth from his casement, he saw rock and river alike subjected to the power of winter ; hoar-frost whitened the surface of the precipitous acclivity ; and thin flakes of snow, which glittered in the cold sunshine like plates of metal, fringed the shallow edges of the stream.

It was plain that there would be no escape from the castle that day; and it was consequently with a renewed determination to make their lengthened sojourn within its walls as agreeable as was consistent with a compulsory residence, that the party again met; and soon the sound of music, and the voice of woman's laughter, that sweetest and most melodious of all tones when it is regulated by gracefulness, rang through the spacious halls; while the excitement of both dice and cards was not wanting for those who preferred uncertain fortune to rational and calm enjoyment.

A stroll upon the ramparts was ventured by some of the guests; and thus, with the always important business of the banquet, the day passed over so pleasantly, that many of those who had repined at their detention from the dissipations of the capital, had good reason to recal it with regret, ere many months had succeeded their departure from the frontier-fortress.

It is an experience that all of us occasionally make as life lengthens. We fret and chafe under restraint, even when it involves neither inconvenience nor suffering. We had arranged things otherwise,

and we become irritable whenever our plans are thwarted, although we are compelled to acknowledge to our own hearts that they might not have secured to us greater satisfaction than is produced in very despite of all preconcerted measures ; but it is only at a later hour, when inconvenience and annoyance come upon us, that we look back and marvel how we could have rebelled against the fate which compelled us to be happy in a way that we had not anticipated, and for which we had consequently made no preparation.

When the evening had again arrived, and that the circle was once more formed around the ample hearth, the promised tradition was eagerly demanded ; and the guest who had volunteered its recital having twisted his moustache into a fiercer curl, and deposited his richly-carved meerschaum in the pocket of his furred and braided coat, at once commenced his task.

THE BROTHERS OF BISTNITZ.

The bold and restless Knights of Podmanin were alike the wonder and the terror of the fifteenth century, not only throughout the province of the

Wáag which they inhabited, but also of Moravia and Silesia, into which they perpetually carried war and rapine.

Nearly the whole of the fortresses on the heights of the Carpathian range, which even in the northern portion of the county of Trenschin have already become lofty and difficult of access, were in their power; some few of them, indeed, by right of inheritance; but the greater number had been won by aggression from their legitimate and rightful owners.

The vassals subjected to their extended sway were very numerous; and the continual success which attended their daring and desperate enterprises, drew to their side so many of those poor and petty nobles whose sole possessions at that troubled period were a high-sounding name and a sharp sword, and to whom the prospect of plunder was ever welcome, that their forces almost assumed the dignity of an army; and what on a smaller scale would have merely worn the aspect of a predatory and factious foray, grew in its more extended shape into all the menace of an aggressive war.

Thus, for instance, in 1466, Blaise of Podmanin and Bielko of Lednitz entered Moravia at the head of a strong body of men, plundered and sacked the holy cloister of Wisowitz, and devastated the surrounding country to so frightful an extent that Podiebrad, King of Bohemia, wrote to demand redress from his son-in-law, the great Matthias Corvinus, in an autograph letter; although only a short time previously the Grand Marshal of Bohemia, Mathias Sternberg and Jany Lippa, had made a similar marauding enterprise into Hungary.

But still more famous even than Blaise himself were his grandsons John and Ralph of Podmanin; and the times in which they lived were well suited to the development of their fierce and factious qualities.

Hungary had two kings; each asserting his claim to the crown, and neither possessing sufficient power to secure it. Pressed by Zapólya and his allies the Turks, Ferdinand I. could not controul or limit the excesses of either faction; who, while their respective masters were contending for the throne, ruined the peaceable citizens, under pretext of serving their particular party. The bro-

thers of Podmanin did not fail to profit by the licence of so reckless a period ; and being as uncompromising as they were fortunate, they ultimately subdued the whole of the upper valley of the Wáag, to which they gave the name of the Gespanschaft of Silein, and governed with arbitrary sway.

Numerous complaints and expostulations were made by those oppressed by their iron rule ; and more than one admonitory letter was addressed to them by the sovereign ; but they disregarded both the murmurings of the conquered, and the threatenings of the king ; and even in 1542, when they were at length under sentence of outlawry for their manifold aggressions, there was not a sufficient force available in the province to carry the edict into effect ; the resistance of the brothers sufficing to render of none avail every effort of the royal troops ; and had not dissension broken out between them, it is impossible to calculate upon the results of their unquenchable ambition.

In 1545, however, a feud so deadly in its nature, that it broke away every fraternal bond, and changed them from loving kinsmen into bitter foes, so para-

lyzed their strength, and weakened their resources, that they were finally reduced to obedience, and subjugated to the royal authority.

The cause of their disunion is thus described in the chronicles of the time :—

Winter was approaching. The last clinging and discoloured leaves were dropping reluctantly from the forest boughs, and the frost-touched vegetation was garbing the earth in a sombre and monotonous drapery of russet ; the winds swept down from the heights shrilly and angrily ; and the dancing river had taken a leaden hue ; when the two strong Knights of Podmanin sat together before the ample hearth of their castle of Bistnitz. Both were sheathed in complete suits of steel armour ; and as the fierce flames, which rose and fell in their dallying with the huge pine-logs that fed the fire, flashed over their tall and muscular forms, they seemed to draw sparks of light from the scales of the gleaming armour.

A table stood before them, on which lay their trusty swords, side by side with a portly pitcher of wine, and two antique silver drinking cups ; which looked as though they had been originally destined

to a holier purpose than that which they now served.

The brothers were in the full strength and beauty of their manhood ; and had it not been for a fixed ferocity of expression, and a cold haughtiness of look, which betrayed an indifference to all interests but their own, they would both have been strikingly handsome. In person they greatly resembled each other ; and, amid all their evil qualities, the perfect unanimity which had always existed between them had been the one only and holy bond that had seemed to link them to their fellow-men.

They were but recently returned from a successful foray ; and for a time they talked complacently of its results, and consulted together on the arrangements consequent upon them ; but at length John exclaimed suddenly :—

“ Now, curses on these changeful seasons, which ever come athwart our brightest plans, and hold us idle in our own halls like children and women, when we should be up and doing, instead of letting our joints stiffen and our armour rust. Here is the winter on our backs again, threatening us with a three months’ imprisonment.”

“ We can, at least, curtail the term of our captivity by a bold start ere matters become worse ;” answered Ralph : “ How say you ? Shall we hazard one more venture, ere we hang up our battle-axes till the spring ?”

“ Do you think the project worth the risk ?” asked the elder ; “ We can defy hard blows, but it is not so easy in our mountain-passes to set a snow-storm at defiance.”

“ I am ready to make the trial ;” said the younger composedly.

“ So be it then, in the name of all the Saints !” retorted John with a hoarse laugh ; “ I know a certain Baron in Moravia who is overhoused, and should be taught economy—He may be worth the trouble of a lesson—so my plan is fixed ; but it will be too small a matter to require two masters, and you are not bound to follow me.”

“ Nor shall I ;” said Ralph, as he stretched forth his long limbs still more forward towards the bright blaze : “ I will on to Silesia, where I shall probably be an unexpected guest at this season ; although, if I have any luck, not an unsuccessful one. And now that we are resolved, let us lose no

more time. In five days all may be prepared. The names of such of our allies as will be most useful to each may be easily called over, and warning given to them to take up arms ; while there are few of our own subjects* who require much time for preparation."

As they decided in this conversation, so they ultimately acted ; and at the end of a week each had marshalled his forces, and commenced his march.

Fortune, which ever seems by some strange fatality to favour the wicked, was peculiarly propitious on this occasion to Ralph ; for he had scarcely reached the pass of the Jablunka when he fell in with a carriage, surrounded by armed horsemen, which he immediately attacked. The carriage contained Girich of Lassenkowitz, an old Silesian nobleman, and his beautiful and only daughter the Lady Hedwig, who were on their way to Hungary, guarded by a party of their retainers. The struggle was of short duration ; the strength of the adversaries being so great as to render the very effort

* In Hungary all vassals to a feudal chief are denominated subjects.

made by the Silesians a mere voluntary act of madness ; for, bravely as the vassals rallied round their lord, who, aged as he was, drew his sword in defence of his helpless child, there was not the most remote hope of escape ; and thus, in less than a moment, the hardy old Baron fell to the earth smitten with a dangerous wound ; while his insensible daughter was torn from the carriage, and made the spoil of the victor.

Sir Ralph of Podmanin, although by no means susceptible of the softer emotions, was yet human ; and, consequently, he could not look upon the beautiful girl who lay senseless in his arms, without experiencing a feeling equally new and incomprehensible ; and he exerted every energy to revive her, while his associates and followers were pursuing their work of plunder, and seizing upon everything within their reach.

His too officious care at length succeeded : a slight flush rose to the cheeks of Hedwig, and she opened her eyes ; but it was only to be conscious that her father lay stretched on the earth beside her, his limbs rigid, and his gray hairs dabbled in blood ; and with a deep groan, and a faint shud-

dering of her whole frame, she relapsed into the fearful swoon from which she had just awakened.

The carriage having been pillaged, and no further booty remaining to be obtained, the Knight commanded his party to remount; and having placed his fair prize in the arms of a sturdy horseman, with strict injunctions to be careful of her safety, he left the old Baron and his brave vassals, wounded and helpless as they were, to their fate; and instead of pursuing his original intention of pushing on to Silesia, gave orders for an immediate return to Bistnitz.

So thoroughly had the followers of Podmanin performed their business of plunder, that they had not only secured the weapons of the old Baron, and the jewels that they found upon his person, but, owing to the costliness of their material, had actually deprived him of his garments; and thus, when they abandoned him, as they believed, to die, he had to contend, not alone with the smart of his wound, but also with the damps of the night, which were fast gathering about him when he awoke to consciousness.

The spot where he lay was a deep hollow, one of

the most difficult portions of the mountain pass ; and his first feeling when he had recalled his senses was one of deep despair ; but he resolved to abide his fate without a murmur, or any effort which could not fail to increase his bodily suffering, and which must only be productive of disappointment.

He had scarcely made this determination when he remembered Hedwig, his pure, and fond, and lovely child, and then indeed he gnashed his teeth in impotent passion, as he mentally contemplated her probable fate ; but the very horror of his own thoughts gave him strength and courage, as he vowed to himself, under the clear sky of heaven, that he would strive to live, were it only for vengeance on her ravisher.

Under the excitement of this resolution he dragged himself along the steep and rocky defiles, leaving a track of blood upon the rock as he writhed onward ; in the hope of being enabled to reach the wretched hut of a forester which he remembered to have passed on his way, and to have made glad with the alms that he flung to a woman, who, with three or four sunburnt and half-naked children clustered about her, had stood with

dilated eyes and parted lips, staring in mute and stupid wonder as his equipage approached the hovel.

It was a desperate effort ; but the thirst for vengeance that was tugging at his heart rendered him for a time unconscious both of suffering and fatigue ; and just as the dawn was breaking in the east, he found himself, maimed and almost expiring, at the threshold of the hut. Once arrived there, the excitement of the attempt was at an end, and he relapsed into helplessness ; but never once did his eyes wander from the door of the miserable dwelling in which was now centred all his chance of life.

Fortunately for the aged sufferer, he was not fated much longer to endure the keen and biting blasts which accompanied the dawn, as if to sweep away the lingering vapours that still clung dankly to the mountain side ; for ere many minutes had elapsed, the hardy forester came forth with his rifle in his hand, and his axe in his girdle, to proceed to his daily toil.

Great was his consternation when he discovered the appalling object which lay stretched before his threshold ; and the exclamation that he made

drew his wife to his side ; who, on approaching the wounded man, was not long in discovering her benefactor of the preceding day.

The recognition was serviceable to the poor sufferer, for it augmented the care and zeal of the wondering and terrified peasants ; who, having covered the old Magnate with some of their own coarse but cleanly garments, laid him on a rude bed formed of Indian-corn straw, and the skins of wild animals, which had been shot by the forester ; supplied him with such food as their hut afforded, and gathered from his disjointed sentences a tolerably distinct idea of the cause which had reduced him to his present plight. They drove the children from the solitary apartment that composed their dwelling to gambol in the sunshine, lest their young voices should disturb the invalid ; and then, with a prayer and a blessing, they left him for a time to his repose, and went forth to their labour.

When he awoke, the active mother was dispensing to her little ones their mid-day meal of black bread and grapes, keeping meanwhile a careful eye on her patient, through the open door of the hut ; and no sooner did she discover that he

had ceased to sleep than she hastened to his side, and with considerable skill dressed his wound, and laid him in a position of greater ease. This done, she dispatched her elder boy to the forest to summon his father, who was not slow in obeying the call; and who set forth within the hour to inform the household of the Baron of the evil chance that had befallen him. Early on the morrow his son, a brave and noble youth, arrived with a strong party of armed retainers, and a litter, in order to remove his wounded parent; which he did, after having breathed a solemn vow to leave no effort untried that might enable him to revenge the abduction of his sister.

The miserable Hedwig, meanwhile, was detained a close prisoner in her chamber, of which her captor kept the key; and into which no one was permitted to enter save the Knight himself, and one female attendant, whom he on every occasion accompanied to the threshold of the apartment, and then closed the door upon her, until she made the signal that her duties to the fair captive were performed.

And she was indeed a fair captive; with eyes of deep blue, fringed with long dark lashes, and locks

of paly gold waving over her shoulders, in those rich and rounded volumes which art strives in vain to imitate. Small of stature, but beautifully formed, the Lady Hedwig at sixteen was the very dream of beauty on which the most fastidious cavalier might have loved to linger; while on the fierce Knight of Podmanin her extreme loveliness produced so powerful an effect, that from the moment in which she fell into his hands fray and foray were forgotten, and he seemed to live only to keep watch over the chamber that she inhabited.

But let it not be supposed that the coarse soldier contented himself with keeping this jealous guard over his treasure, without availing himself largely of the privilege which it gave him to intrude his unwelcome presence upon the prisoner. Little formed to win a lady's love, despite his handsome and martial appearance, from the rude and unseemly life which he had so long led, Sir Ralph had also, in the case of the Baron of Lassenkowitz's daughter, the additional disadvantage of being recognised as her father's murderer; for of the old Noble's escape from death neither the one nor the other entertained hope or idea.

It was consequently with a feeling of the most undisguised loathing and aversion that the Lady Hedwig looked upon him ; and when on the second day of her imprisonment at Bistnitz, the Knight not only inflicted his presence upon her, but actually talked to her of love in the style of a freebooter and a ruffian, the indignation of the fair girl was added to her hate ; and the gentle young creature, who had never hitherto been approached save with respect and courtesy, rose from her seat with a dignity so impressive, and a rebuke so keen, that the bold chieftain, whom neither blood nor suffering could appal, crouched under the flashing of her eye, and the stern haughtiness of her deportment, and hurriedly left the room.

The truce was hollow, however ; for no sooner had the Knight passed from her presence, than he cursed himself for a craven ; and ere he had traversed half the length of the gallery hastily returned to the apartment of his victim. He found her seated with her head pillowed upon her hands, deluged in tears, the hot and bitter tears of outraged innocence and conscious helplessness. As he entered, she started up : and dashing back the long

curls which had fallen about her face, she waved her hand to motion him back, as she said imperiously :

“ Not a step further, Sir Knight ! You, who in your doughty chivalry make war on women, and shame your spurs and your proud name by lawless rapine and fierce aggression. Stand back, sir ! and say your second errand, be it what it may, with speed, for I would be alone.”

Sir Ralph laughed a mocking laugh : “ You queen it bravely, lady : ” he retorted ; “ but you forget that you are in a stronghold of the Podmanins, where their will is law, and their pleasure the duty of those about them. I have already told you that I love you —— ”

“ Love me ! ” echoed Hedwig, in an accent of intense disgust ; “ Would a freebooter and a rebel persist in talking to the Lady of Lassenkowitz of love ? We have had enough of this already. I plight my troth to no robber-chief.”

“ I do not ask so much ; ” sneered her captor ; “ We have little priestcraft to answer for at Bistnitz. We are free mountaineers ; and do not love to shackle ourselves with any fetters, however light.”

“How, sir!” once more exclaimed the indignant girl; “Have you no fear of Heaven’s thunder that you dare talk to me thus?”

“I fear nothing,” was the reply.

“Then, may the Virgin save me!” murmured his victim, sinking upon her knees; “for on earth there is no hope.”

“Pshaw! this is fooling;” exclaimed the Knight, while with his muscular arm he lifted her from the earth as the wind scatters the thistle-down; “Listen to me, maiden. I have already told you that I love you—you are in my power—and I am not one accustomed to contradiction. Opposition will be idle; for what have you to hope? or with what will you resist? You are the first woman who has ever made the pulses of my heart quicken in her presence; and neither tears nor prayers will avail you here. I give you till to-morrow to reflect—but from to-morrow you are mine.” And so saying, Sir Ralph of Podmanin turned a long lingering look upon the quailing girl, and left the room, carefully securing the heavy door behind him.

The morrow came; but the attendant who had entered to attire the Lady Hedwig for the day, as

was her wont, was overcome with terror when she discovered her stretched across the floor on the very spot where the Knight had left her, and where she had lain all night insensible. On removing her to her bed, the unhappy girl only recovered her senses for a while to lose them again in the still more painful delirium of fever; and when her disappointed and enraged captor next looked upon her, she no longer recognised him, for her thoughts had wandered back to her own happy home; and she talked of beautiful and peaceful things, of her birds and flowers, her gray-haired father, and her gallant brother; and she called them by a thousand gentle and endearing names, and warbled out sweet snatches of familiar songs; and looked so wildly beautiful amid her malady, that even his cold heart was touched; and he bade the woman, who stood weeping beside her, console her when she recovered consciousness, with the assurance that he would not again come into her presence until she should have strength to listen to his arguments; when, having gained this unwonted victory over himself, Sir Ralph strode to the ramparts, and with folded arms and gloomy brow, his armour rattling as he moved

along, and his crimson plume waving in the wind, sought to overcome the vexation which was gnawing at his heart.

Once or twice he bitterly reproached himself for what he was pleased to consider the womanish weakness which had betrayed him into the promise to which he had pledged himself; but the one virtue of truth was yet left to him, and he had now no alternative.

Another and another day succeeded; and still the precarious state of his captive, of which he was careful to assure himself, banished him from her presence; and at length, wearied by such unaccustomed inaction, and satisfied that the unfortunate Hedwig could not elude his power, he resolved on quitting the fortress, and making a visit to a neighbouring chief who was one of the allies of his house.

This was not to be, however; for scarcely had he sprung upon his horse, when the well-known sound of his brother's bugle awoke the echoes of the mountain, and he saw the foremost of the party defiling through the rocky and narrow pass.

Tightening his rein, and pressing his armed heels into the flanks of his fiery Arab, he accordingly

shot through the arch, crossed the drawbridge, and advanced to meet his brother, who recognising him afar off, waved his hand in welcome, and pointed significantly to the long train of animals laden with plunder, by which he was accompanied. But not even the spoil on which he looked, or the presence of the brother whom he had so long loved, could dispel the cloud which darkened his brow, conscious as he was that for the first time he had a secret and divided interest from his kinsman; and it was, therefore, coldly and uncheerily that he met the gay and hearty greetings of the elder Knight.

In vain did the latter relate the great success of his expedition, and all the circumstances by which it was attended; he soon perceived that the thoughts of Ralph were not engaged by the recital; and that although he made short and apposite answers, they were rather the effect of habit than the result of attention.

As soon as they reached the hall, and that they found themselves for a few instants alone, John earnestly asked the cause of his brother's gloomy mood, but he was shortly and testily answered; and more surprised than before, he left the hall, and

went in search of some one who might solve the mystery. It soon ceased to be such; for the Castellan at once informed him of the presence of the Lady Hedwig in the castle, and added, that since her capture the younger Knight had become totally changed, walking constantly on the rampart which stretched below her chamber, and seeming careless of all his former avocations.

Loud laughed the doughty Sir John of Podmanin at the idea that his stalwart brother could be subdued by a woman; and hurrying back to the hall, with the merry smile still upon his lips, he rallied him upon the new character he had assumed of a love-sick suitor. But Ralph would brook no jest upon the subject; and with a look which the elder well understood, he bade him be chary of his words when he chose this theme of converse, for that it was one on which he would suffer no one to trench rudely, and that he who did so should thenceforward be to him a stranger and an enemy, even were he his own brother.

“Nay, nay; let us not quarrel for a peevish girl;” said John, as he extended his brawny hand in amity to his excited kinsman; “surely after

years of confidence and good fellowship it would ill become us now to brawl about a woman. Clear your brow, Ralph ; they are about to spread the board ; and let us forget in a bowl of wine that there is a petticoat between Bistnitz and Presburg."

But although he thus endeavoured to quiet the jealous fears of his brother, the curiosity of John was greatly roused. That Ralph, who had hitherto looked upon the women whom they had occasionally captured with an indifference amounting to contempt, should have become thus enamoured of his Silesian prisoner, appeared to the rough Knight something so marvellous, that he immediately resolved to see the wondrous beauty who had wrought the spell ; this, however, he soon found to be almost impossible, for never was jailor more vigilant than Sir Ralph to prevent all approach to his captive.

For a day or two John bore the disappointment patiently, trusting that by some unlooked-for chance he might outwit his brother, and accomplish his object ; but the total want of occupation to which he was subjected from the setting-in of the frost, joined to the suspense and annoyance consequent on this, the first contradiction to which he had

ever been subjected, at length overcame his better nature; and he ultimately approached Ralph one morning, and in an abrupt manner insisted on being admitted into the apartment of the Lady Hedwig.

“When you are so, it shall be over my prostrate body,” said Ralph, coldly.

“Why, this is childish!” persisted John, whose temper was by no means improved by the resolute tone and manner of his brother; “All has hitherto been common property between us; and I have as much right over this silly girl, as you have over the booty which I have just won in Moravia at the risk of my own life, and that of my followers.”

“Keep it, or divide it among your followers, as you list;” was the reply: “no one shall look upon the maiden save by my own sanction, and that I am not likely to give lightly.”

“How, Sir Ralph of Podmanin! would you dictate to your elder brother in his own hall?” furiously exclaimed John; “Do you dare to play the despot to him of whom you should rather be the vassal?”

“I dare do anything to maintain my right.”

“Right!” once more pealed out John, whose

reckless violence was rapidly mastering his reason ;
“ I appeal to all here present.”

“ I admit no appeal,” coldly interposed Ralph ;
“ I abide by my own decision.”

“ On your own head be it then,” said his brother ;
who, according to the fashion of the period, acknowledged but one method of terminating a quarrel ;
and drawing his sword, he prepared to make the hall a scene of fratricide, when some of the guests interfered, and compelled both the brothers (for Ralph had immediately followed his example) to sheathe their weapons ; urging that they should not suffer so insignificant an object as a woman to bring feud between them.

Moodily and in silence the two knights reluctantly complied with the entreaties of their friends, but their hearts were not in the reconciliation ; and although they pledged each other at the mid-day meal, their spirits burnt within them, and the bitter work of hatred had begun.

It chanced that very morning that the attendant of the Lady Hedwig had carried to her employer the welcome intelligence that the health of the maiden had become greatly restored by the quiet of

the last few days; and that although her cheek was still very pale, and that tears were for ever in her eyes, she had recovered her strength sufficiently to stand for hours at her casement, looking wistfully towards the frontiers of Silesia; as though she nourished a hope that deliverance would soon come to her from thence, and that she was watching for its messenger.

The news of her recovery, coupled with the unfortunate hint that accompanied it, had ill prepared Ralph for the scene which he afterwards enacted with his brother; and the meal had scarcely terminated when, knowing that the wine-cup was always welcome to John, and that he was surrounded by men who were well disposed to bear him company in a debauch, he resolved on making a visit to his prisoner, and compelling her to submit to his authority, ere his brother should have time by any stratagem to rob him of his prize.

But Sir Ralph had reckoned hastily; for although on this occasion his brother drank deep, he did so with a haste and impetuosity which soon caused the wine to mount into his brain; and he suddenly rose from table with a fixed determination that no human

power should longer prevent his intrusion on the presence of the unhappy prisoner. Having been informed that his brother was at that moment in the apartment of the Lady, he lost not a moment in following him; and as Ralph had never contemplated the possibility of his appearance at that time, he had, according to his custom while with the maiden, left the ponderous key in the lock; and thus, when the elder Knight reached the threshold of the chamber, he found no impediment to his entrance; and flinging back the heavy door, strode resolutely into the chamber.

Great was the rage of Ralph when, at the sound of an approaching footstep, he turned and recognised his brother, who, with his gaze fastened on the beautiful and unhappy girl who was kneeling in bitter agony at his own feet, was rapidly traversing the floor, and making towards her. Madened at the sight, and without giving himself a moment to reflect, he sprang upon the intruder, and grasping him by the throat, would have strangled him as he stood; but he contended with no puny adversary; and John, already mad with passion, and heated with wine, retorted the violence so re-

sistlessly, that after a struggle as desperate as it was unavailing, they both fell to the earth together, locked in a foul embrace, in which on either side the fiend seemed to have superseded the brother.

The shrieks of the terrified Hedwig had, meanwhile, alarmed such of the inmates of the fortress as chanced to be in the neighbourhood of her apartment; and several of the retainers rushing into the room, the unnatural combatants were with difficulty separated, gasping for breath, and nearly exhausted, and borne away to their different chambers; but every bond of affection had now been rent asunder; and each, as he paced to and fro the floor recalling the events of the last hour, breathed only, lived only, for revenge.

After a night in which neither had closed his eyes in sleep, John sent the gauntlet of defiance to his brother, and summoned him to a combat *à l'outrance* on the third day from thence. Ralph replied by an assurance that he had been anticipated in his own intentions, and that he joyfully accepted the challenge, being unwilling only to consent to a waste of time which to him appeared worse than

idle ; and suggesting that the meeting should take place within the hour.

This precipitation, however, became a subject of intense alarm to the crowd of petty nobles by whom the brothers were surrounded, and who felt the probability which existed, that in the present excited state of the two Knights neither would escape the combat with life, and that thus their own fate would be irrevocably sealed ; for it was only under the shadow of the name of Podmanin, and the powerful protection of the brothers, that they could pursue their career of outrage and violence without incurring certain destruction. Thus they resolved on using every effort to effect a reconciliation, and few were the arguments which they left untried ; but each failed in its turn, until one of the party suggested that as the girl had been the cause of the feud, she should also terminate it by choosing between them.

After considerable difficulty, the brothers were reluctantly induced to consent to this arrangement, but it availed them nothing ; for the indignant and outraged Lady of Lassenkowitz resolutely refused to give her hand to either ; and insisted with

haughty pertinacity, and a recovered courage, growing out of the dissension between her jailors, that she should forthwith be restored to her family; nor could either threats or entreaties induce her to lend herself to the odious and unprincipled proposal.

For a few moments all was once more discord and violence, when suddenly the same individual who had made the first suggestion, exclaimed brutally:—

“Urge her no longer, my good lords; leave her to her obstinate pride, which it will be easy hereafter to quell, and decide the question by lot; swearing ere you do so, to abide by whatever chance may betide.”

Loud acclamation welcomed the advice, and it was forthwith followed up. The lots were drawn, and the daughter of the proud Baron Girich became the property of Sir John of Podmanin; and while Ralph turned darkly aside, muttering a fearful oath that he would yet frustrate the triumph of his brother, the elder Knight informed the fainting girl with a harsh laugh, that he gave her two days to prepare for her bridal; and that, meanwhile, unlike the selfish lover from whom he had rescued

her, his friends were welcome to surround her with their admiration, if they had time to spare in courtesies to a weeping child who had been but too much honoured by the fray that she had caused between two bold knights; and so saying, he raised her from the floor, and despite her resistance, pressed his coarse lips to hers, and bade her learn obedience ere they met again on the morrow.

At day-dawn, however, intelligence was brought to Bistnitz by one of their spies, that the Counts John and George Szuniogh had been suddenly called to the Imperial Court, and that they had hastily quitted their Castle of Budethin with a numerous retinue, leaving only a scanty garrison in charge of the fortress. The possession of this stronghold had long been an object of paramount interest to the Knights of Podmanin; for in addition to its individual importance, it commanded from its peculiar position, the entrance to Silein; and, being situated immediately on the river, could enforce tribute from every vessel frequenting the town for the purposes of traffic; while, added to this consideration, was the fact, that it was the only fortress throughout the whole of the Upper Wáag

of which they had not yet succeeded in making themselves masters.

The moment appeared favourable; and an immediate attack being resolved upon, the arrangements were made with an energy of purpose, amid which John really forgot, and Ralph appeared to forget, the very existence of the unfortunate Lady Hedwig. Speed was above all things necessary, in order that no rumour of danger might reach the brave chiefs of Szuniogh, and enable them to return to the protection of their stronghold.

Accordingly on the third day, the brothers left Bistnitz at the head of a formidable force, but they had not travelled many hours when Sir Ralph became so seriously ill that it was with difficulty he could keep the saddle. He, however, for a considerable time withstood the expostulations of the elder Knight, who urged him to return, and put himself under the care of the castle leech, for he persisted in alleging that he should never forgive himself if he were not at the taking of Budethin; but in another hour his indisposition had so alarmingly increased, that he could contend with it no longer; and yielding to the reasonings of his compa-

nions, and refusing the attendance of more than a couple of his followers, he took a hasty and earnest leave of the party, and turned his horse's head towards Bistnitz.

For a time he rode listlessly at a foot's pace, with his head drooping forward, and his arms listlessly crossed upon his breast, suffering his noble Arab to choose his own path; while the two swordsmen by whom he was followed speculated in a low voice upon his sudden illness.

"Now, St. Stephen shrive them both!" said the taller of the two; "You may believe me, Istvan, that he got an unlucky grip the day they wrestled together for that Silesian girl, and he will mayhap die of it."

"Of what?" asked his companion with a grim smile: "Of the grip or the girl? for to me the one seems to the full as likely as the other. I would bet a tithe of the plunder of which this precious sickness has baulked you and me, Gabor, that Sir Ralph of Podmanin is as whole of body as either of us, though he may be somewhat sick at heart."

"How say you ——?" commenced Istvan; but his question was suddenly cut short by the Knight

himself, who, after languidly turning his head to ascertain whether his brother's party were yet in sight, and satisfying himself that they had turned an abrupt angle of the defile, and were entirely lost to view, suddenly drew up his rein, flung himself forward in the saddle, and striking his gallant barb with the spur, bounded forward at a swift gallop towards Bistnitz.

A meaning glance passed between the two retainers; and then, imitating the example of their lord, they were in the next instant rapidly clearing the space between themselves and their fortress-home.

Great had been the delight of the Lady Hedwig when she discovered the absence of the brothers; and the first ray of hope which had dawned on her captivity, cheered her as she remembered, that could she gain over the old woman who officiated as her attendant, she might possibly effect her escape ere their return. She accordingly begged her for the first time to remain when, her duties accomplished, she was about to retire from the apartment; and having regaled her with a cup of Tokayer wine which had long stood untouched upon her buffèt, she

drew towards her a ponderous workstand, with which she affected to be employed, and encouraged the old woman to converse.

The garrulous old dame, nothing loth, and eager at once to conciliate the lady and to do her duty towards her feudal lords, gossipped on under the inspiration of the maiden smiles and the amber-coloured cordial; strangely blending her awkward flatteries on the beauties of the captive, and her panegyrics on the wealth, and power, and generosity, and prowess of the two absent knights; and although the heart of the timid girl sickened as she heard their names, she nevertheless suffered her companion to pursue the subject without rebuke, in order not to startle her by any avowal of disgust. Thus, half listening to the monotonous voice of the attendant, and half absorbed by her own anxious thoughts, sat the Lady Hedwig, bending gracefully over the tapestry frame; when a heavy step upon the threshold of her chamber caused her suddenly to look up; and the blood mantled over her brow and bosom as she saw standing before her, cased in armour, and heated with travel, Sir Ralph of Podmanin! A wave of his

arm drove the old serving-woman from the chamber; and then hastily approaching the maiden, and seizing her small hand which he held forcibly clasped in his own, he seated himself beside her, and began to urge his suit with a vehemence that at once aroused the spirit of the terrified girl.

“For shame, sir!” she said bitterly; “Are you not capable of honour and good faith even towards your own brother? Did you not pledge yourself to the chance which was to decide my fate, as though it had been that of a serf’s daughter? Unhand me instantly; or by the Virgin, I will appeal to your own blood for the protection which my murdered father can no longer afford to me!”

“Why do you taunt me by trusting rather to my brother than myself?” urged Sir Ralph; “I have become a changed man through your influence; while John, though he disputed your possession from jealousy of his privileges, does not even affect to love you.”

“And for that at least I bless him!” said the indignant Hedwig; “for it will subject me to less insult. I spurn your love with loathing; and would rather be the wife of the veriest churl on my father’s

land, than the bride of a noble without honour, and a knight without chivalry."

"Do not urge me beyond my patience;" exclaimed Sir Ralph impetuously; "You are in my power, and I know not why I refrain from exerting it this very moment. Tremble, proud girl, if you drive me to extremity."

"Cast not the blame on me;" said the maiden, as with sudden strength she wrenched away her hand, and rose from beside him; "Cast not the blame on me, if you are a traitor even to your own brother. I tell you, Sir Ralph of Podmanin, that if you have still one true pulse in your heart, you will not dare to play the ruffian in your own halls, and wrong your brother's bride."

"You do not know me;" muttered the Knight between his clenched teeth, as he grasped the Lady Hedwig by the wrist with such violence that her slight fingers appeared to be bursting beneath the pressure; "Mine you were, and mine you shall be yet. I won you, and I will wear you! Woman, my love for you is gnawing away my heart-strings, and withering up my energies. I have listened too long to your idle taunts, for you have been beau-

tiful in your contempt, and therefore have I borne it; but the hour of forbearance is past. Away with this idle fooling—Poor fly! would you struggle with Ralph of Podmanin?” and the laugh was that of a fiend, with which he flung his arm about her waist, and drew her towards him.

A sudden thought flashed across the brain of the persecuted girl. She ceased to resist; and with a second peal of laughter, more scornful than the first, the Knight released her arm, exclaiming: “So, so, you will hear reason, and my warning has not been in vain.” As he spoke he resumed his seat, and she sank passively beside him.

“Why this is well;” he continued; “Had you been ever thus, you had spared sorrow to yourself, and strife to me. But away with the past—you shall now teach me how to play the lover;” and with awkward tenderness he began to wreath his fingers among the clustering and golden locks which waved over the shoulders of the maiden; whose blanched cheek, quivering lip, and restless eye, might have convinced him, had he marked them, that she would prove no placid victim.

“And now to seal our compact on your sweet lips;” he pursued, and was about to clasp her,

when by a sudden effort she wrenched his dagger from its sheath, and bounding across the floor stood firmly and defyingly before him. "Move but one step towards me!" she cried passionately; "but one, and I will bury this weapon in my heart. I swear it by Our Lady of Agony!—a fearful vow which none may break, and live."

"You dare not!" gasped out the Knight; "The blade is poisoned."

"I thank you for the news;" said Hedwig with flashing eyes and crimsoned cheek; "I shall the sooner and the more surely be at rest. Now, coward, will you be my murderer?"

"Throw down the dagger, and I swear to leave you in peace;" replied Sir Ralph; "That is no weapon for a woman's hand. Cast it from you, and listen to me."

"Speak;" said the Lady; "I must listen, for I have no alternative; but I will not put aside my only hope of safety."

"I swear ——" commenced the Knight.

"Blaspheme not;" broke in Hedwig impatiently; "or swear by the powers of evil whom you serve, for the saints would reject your oath. If, however, you are about to bid me put faith in you, I tell you

that all the vows your fertile spirit may invent will never shake my purpose. I will *not* trust you."

"Woman!" fiercely exclaimed the Knight, as he rushed from the apartment; "you shall yet rue this hour. Fiend! you shall pay me every instant of this torture by a tear of blood."

Nor was the threat an idle one; for Sir Ralph of Podmanin no sooner left the presence of his victim, and flung off the spell of her beauty, than the words which he had uttered in his passion became prophetic of his purpose; and he vowed a deep and fearful vow, that if he himself could not possess the maiden, his brother never should call her wife.

There was an easy mean of preventing this, and as ready an agent; and the Knight gnashed his teeth till the blood burst from his lips, as he muttered to himself: "Ay, so shall it be—*poison*—and her old waiting woman shall quench her last thirst with the deadly draught—she at least will not dare to resist my will."

His hellish resolution once taken, the false noble became impatient to put it into effect; the very idea that his brother might return from Budethin while

Hedwig still lived, and triumph over him by her possession, maddened him, and aroused all his worst passions. He knew that not a moment must be lost ; and if at intervals the memory of her loveliness, or the strength of his passion, swept across his spirit and pleaded for mercy, he instantly remembered that armed as she was with his own dagger, and resolute as he felt her to be in her purpose, she was lost to him for ever ; and consequently these passing weaknesses, as he taught himself to deem them, only hardened his heart the more, when he put them from him.

He hesitated for a moment whether he should not again force himself into her presence, and by persisting in his suit, drive her to the deed which she had threatened, and thus clear himself of her blood ; but this sophistry was too shallow to deceive even him, evil as he was ; while he instantly felt that should his brother return and discover the manner of her death, the fact of her possessing a weapon, and that weapon proving to be his own dagger, would suffice to renew the feud between them ; while, should she die in her bed by poison, he could assert, and if necessary, force her attend-

ant to swear, that she had swallowed it to escape the threatened marriage.

Satisfied, therefore, that his original design was the safest, and consequently the most judicious, the cold-hearted Sir Ralph prepared to put it into practice ; and having summoned the old woman to his presence, and explained to her his purpose, he placed in her hands a small phial containing a liquid alike colourless and tasteless ; one of those frightful and mysterious compounds then frequently in use ; with orders that at sunset on the morrow it should be administered to the unhappy Hedwig.

Expostulation would have been not only idle but dangerous, for those were not days in which a vassal dared to question the will of his lord, be it what it might ; and accordingly the aged attendant took the death-dealing beverage from her master, and repeated the oath of obedience which he exacted from her.

The fulfilment of her task was easy ; for after the evening meal the Lady was accustomed to swallow a draught of clear cold water, which was daily served to her by the old woman ; but notwithstanding a long life passed in blind and implicit compliance with every

mandate of her imperious masters, a pang smote upon the heart of the withered crone as she contemplated the destruction of the young and beautiful creature who confided in her, and by whom she had never been addressed save in gentleness. She too well knew, however, that from the will of the Knight there was no appeal; and ere she lay down that night on her bed, she knelt and fervently prayed that the saints would absolve her from a crime, of which she was only the humble and unavailing instrument.

The morrow, so big with fate for the daughter of Count Girich, came at last. The dawn broke brightly, and the risen sun flooded the earth and the broad river with glory; its cold but brilliant beams glanced upon the hoar-frost, and tinged every object with the hues of jewels, without possessing sufficient warmth to rob the slightest bough of its pendant icicle; and the sharp elastic wind swept keenly and healthfully across the sky, driving before it the light masses of vapour that hung like snow-wreaths on the deep blue of the frosty sky.

It was precisely one of those days when the very fact of existence is an enjoyment; and the captive

girl, forbidden the indulgence of exercise, and panting to inhale the bright freshness of the morning, flung back her casement, and stood in her usual attitude with her eyes turned towards her own loved home, while the breeze scattered her golden tresses far and wide, and gave a richer colouring to her cheek.

A sound beneath the casement attracted her attention, and as she cast down her eyes she discovered Sir Ralph of Podmanin standing immediately below her chamber with gloomy brow and folded arms. He looked up as she was preparing to move away, and demanded in a harsh tone: "Do you relent? It is not yet too late;" but she withdrew without vouchsafing any reply; nor was it until she heard the heavy foot-falls of the Knight upon the crisped earth as he left the rampart, that she ventured to return and close the window.

The apparition of her detested captor destroyed at once the momentary calm which had crept over the spirit of the lady, for it convinced her that she was still the subject of his thoughts; and it was consequently with renewed uneasiness that she

seated herself to the solitary meal which was spread for her at sunset by her attendant. Had she been less occupied by her own thoughts she could not have failed to remark the unusual trepidation of the old woman, who repeatedly crossed herself as she changed the dishes; and hastily averted her head whenever the gentle prisoner chanced to look towards her.

Languidly as the Lady Hedwig partook of the food which was placed before her, the repast at length terminated, and she asked as usual for the goblet of water, which was slowly presented to her by her attendant. She was in the act of raising it to her lips when the report of a rifle was heard, and the warder's horn suddenly pealed out its warning of an approaching enemy.

"The saints have heard my prayers, sinner as I am!" exclaimed the aged woman as she dashed the goblet from the hand of the astonished maiden, and flung herself vehemently upon her knees. "The Virgin, blessed be her name! wills not that you should perish. Ave Maria! you are saved."

"What means this strange emotion?" asked the Lady, as she rose from her seat, and shook

away the water which had been scattered over her dress.

"You are saved!" repeated the old woman; "saved, when I thought that there was no help—saved on the very threshold of the grave."

Her extraordinary agitation betrayed the dark secret to the quick perception of Hedwig. "Tell me;" she said firmly, as she grasped the arm of her quailing attendant; "Did you offer me poison?"

A deep groan was the only reply, as her repentant companion covered her face with her spread hands, as though she did not dare to look upon her intended victim. The heart-stricken girl instinctively moved from beside her; and casting herself upon the sofa, gave way to the wretchedness which assailed her, without a thought beyond her own misery, or a speculation on the cause of the hurry and uproar which were going on within the fortress.

Accustomed as she now was to the constant turmoil of a marauding life, had she reflected for an instant on the confusion which had suddenly taken place in the castle, she would probably have attri-

buted it to the return of the elder Knight and his turbulent followers ; and thus she abandoned herself to the misery of her conscious helplessness without even glancing from her casement, or heeding the frantic gestures of the old woman who had taken her stand beside it, and who was wringing her hands in all the energy of terror and despair.

Suddenly the door of her chamber opened, and as she looked up to resent the intrusion with which she was threatened, she uttered a cry of joy, and in the next instant was in the arms of her brother !

For a few moments neither could articulate a syllable ; but they gazed upon each other with the long-searching look of tenderness and love ; and then, when each felt that it was indeed a blessed reality, they gradually recovered some degree of composure, and were enabled to converse, and to pour out their gladness in words, as they sat side by side, with clasped hands and eager eyes, almost fearing to relax their hold, lest they might be again separated.

The tale of Hedwig was soon told, for her high-hearted brother had felt that she was worthy to return to the proud shelter of her father's roof from the moment in which their eyes first met ; and her

story was but a record of suffering and resistance ; but his own appearance in the very stronghold of the fierce Knight of Podmanin required more explanation ; and she listened with breathless attention as he dwelt on the secrecy and caution with which he had planned the project of her liberation ; and marched his men in scattered parties until they neared Bistnitz, which each had approached singly, until under cover of the night they had all collected beneath the western rampart.

This feat accomplished, he had taken the fortress by surprise ; for although Ralph instantly flew to arms, and put himself on the defensive, his garrison was so attenuated by the attack on Budethin in which his brother was engaged, that he could make no effective resistance. The enemy swarmed upon the walls ; he had no rational prospect of assistance from without ; and conscious, immediately that he ascertained the identity of his assailants, that he could expect no mercy at the hands of the Lady Hedwig's brother, he fled at the first opportunity ; and amid the confusion of the conflict contrived to effect his escape, favoured by the darkness.

Early on the morrow, according to the fashion of

the period, the fortress of Bistnitz was plundered of all that it contained which was worthy of transport, and instantly enveloped in a mass of flame. So well, indeed, had the indignant retainers of the Baron of Lassenkowitz performed their task, that no human power could have sufficed to save the noble stronghold from utter ruin; and as the brother and sister proceeded on their homeward journey, with hearts full to overflowing of hope and joy, the reflection of the fire which they had kindled at Bistnitz pursued them on their way.

While these events were taking place at his favourite fortress, the elder Knight was rejoicing at Budethin over his easily obtained success. He was presiding at a well-covered board, surrounded by his friends, and occupying the chair of the Count John of Szuniogh, in the very act of raising a full goblet to his lips, when, to his astonishment and consternation, his brother stood before him, with a dim eye and a troubled brow, the harbinger of evil.

John clenched his hand violently, and a bitter curse rose to his lips, as he learnt the fate of his beloved Bistnitz; but he lost not a moment in idle

and inactive regret. Ere an hour had elapsed he was once more in the saddle ; and leaving only a sufficient garrison at Budethin to secure his conquest, he was soon galloping at the head of a strong force to the rescue of his captured stronghold. He arrived, however, too late, for he found nothing but a heap of blackened and smouldering ruins ; and while writhing under the mortification of the shock, he breathed a vow that he would renew the edifice, were it only to obliterate the triumph of the Baron Girich's son.

Bistnitz was accordingly rebuilt, but nothing could restore the union of the two brothers. They had learnt the possibility of a divided interest ; and they had welcomed the lesson, without reflecting that every feud between them must diminish their strength. Their followers ere long became conscious of the schism, and attached themselves to one or the other party, as interest or inclination prompted ; until at length their numerous allies and retainers became split into two separate factions ; and after having endeavoured for a time to pursue each their own career of rapine and violence, and finding themselves constantly worsted by their

adversaries, they ultimately resolved to surrender, and do homage to the Sovereign; and accordingly, in the archives of the year 1546, there exists a record of their submission, and the extension of the royal pardon to both brothers.

After this period they sank into comparative insignificance; and as they each died unmarried, the formidable race of Podmanin became extinct at their death.

CHAPTER VI.

“THE sex has been revenged,” said the host gaily ; “for truly it must be conceded that the heroes of the two last traditions have served but as dark shadows to throw out the bright lights of female virtue and courage. Allowances must be made, however, for the remote period at which these outrages were perpetrated ; for it would be scarcely fair to judge of the moral attributes of a people, by the semi-barbarous usages of a bygone age.”

“And that remark,” observed the Baron Pratnayér, “can in no instance in Europe be more correctly applied than to Hungary. Subjected throughout long centuries to the incursions and aggressions of heathen hordes, only succeeded by the sway of the Infidels ; and this, in its turn, resisted by arbitrary and feudal power, which sacrificed every other consideration to that of conquest and triumph ; the arts unknown, the sciences neglected, and literature altogether forgotten or laid aside, save by a few

pale and obscure students, who, glad to avail themselves of any pursuit which would enable them to endure with greater philosophy the tedious monotony of the cloister, indulged themselves in an inefficient and desultory habit of thought and composition, as uninteresting and unsatisfactory to posterity, as it must have been profitless to themselves. Until the reign of Matthias Corvinus, the Hungarians had never shown that they could appreciate literature, or make worthy additions to its hoards of lore. Had he done no more than convinced them of this fact, it would have sufficed to immortalize his memory."

"And had successive sovereigns followed up the great work;" said the host; "not even the spoliation to which the country was subjected by the Moslem would have sufficed to deprive the literati of Hungary of the high place which they had earned for themselves among the students of Europe. It is surely no small boast, that so early as the year 1473—only three-and-twenty years after the discovery of the art of printing—a press was already established at Buda; while it is well known to all who are conversant with ancient literature, that at

the same period Hungary was much further advanced in all that pertained to letters than even England, to whose exertions in this particular branch of knowledge all praise must be conceded."

"The subsequent retrogression;" followed up Pratnaÿer; "must be, however, in a great degree attributed to the fact that her foreign sovereigns naturally caused a neglect of the native idiom of Hungary. Neither the licentious court of Charles Robert of Anjou, nor the high-toned and chivalrous circle of Maria Theresa, used the Magyar tongue; while the infatuation of the Magnates for the graceful gallantries and elegant refinements of the latter became so great, that they not only sacrificed to its intoxicating pleasures their natural language, but even that which should have been much dearer to them—their natural independence. In later days, Russia, by her encouragement and protection of the Slavonian writers, has done much to repress the genuine language of the country; not only by crushing the energies of the Hungarians themselves, but by disseminating throughout Europe, by means of her own organs, a belief that the decay of the rival idiom was consequent on its inferiority and meagre re-

sources ; when, in point of fact, its copiousness and variety, and its unusually harmonious utterance, are alike remarkable.”

“That is, at least, a liberal admission from a German,” smiled the host.

“We can afford to make it ;” was the reply ; “for as regards flexibility of construction, and wealth of expression, no European tongue surpasses our own ; while it is only such foreigners as have accustomed their ears to the Austrian dialect, who accuse it of harshness and want of melody ; but, Prussian as I am, I do not for a moment venture to institute a comparison of *sound* between our tongue and your own.”

“I trust, indeed, that we may now look forward with some confidence to literary progression ;” said Pálffy ; “The establishment of an University, however comparatively imperfect it may be for the moment, was a great point gained ; and one which cannot fail to exert a wholesome and encouraging effect upon the country. Had our military college only been suffered to exist as a national institution ; and had Austria forborne, by seeking to render it a mere German academy, to crush it at the very moment

when it held out so fair a promise, we should have good and legitimate cause of self-gratulation; while even as it is, the Diet has immortalized itself more than once by making a vigorous stand to expel the Latin idiom from our public assemblies; and we have only to prove true to ourselves, by adopting it universally as our household tongue, instead of degrading ourselves by volunteering the decay of this portion of our nationality, in order to show to all Europe, as well as to demonstrate to our posterity, that ‘the Magyar slave, Eurydice,’ as Martonfi once called our national language, had we thought proper to avail ourselves of its resources, might have enabled us from the first to hold ourselves independent of all foreign idiom.”

“You have already glorious promise among you;” said the Prussian Baron; “and despite all the efforts which have been, and still are, made to blind other countries to your rapid progression in literature and science, the genius of your land will ere long assert itself. The difficulty of attaining your national tongue has deprived many ingenious writers here of the benefit of translation into other languages; but that is an evil which you are

rapidly overcoming among yourselves, by acquiring those of your neighbours, and thereby enabling your compatriots to find translators on the spot ; an advantage which, far from proving of merely individual benefit, will ultimately assert itself as an undeniable national good. Hitherto, the trifling portion of your literature which has found its way beyond the Austrian frontier has been so clipped and crippled by the censor, as not to merit a second dilution ; and thus the very names of the Hungarian literati are, as yet, scarcely known beyond the banks of the Danube ; but this cannot be the case for ever."

"We accept your generous prophecy ;" said the host ; "but we must not forget that we are violating the rules of our little society, and that M. Szápáry promised us a legend of his lordly race. Glad, indeed, shall I be when the day comes on which, told in the Magyar dialect, it will be intelligible to all who hear it ; but we must be satisfied to bequeathe this proud prospect to our children ; and to content ourselves with listening to it in the language which is dear to me, were it only that it is that of one who so well advocates the interests of Hungary."

As the host spoke, he glanced towards the Baron Pratnayer, who answered the compliment by a warm pressure of the hand which was extended to him; while M. Szápáry, perceiving that the party remained silent, and in the attitude of listening, at once commenced the episode so honourable to his ancestors.

THE RANSOM.

Peter Szápáry, an ancestor of the present Counts of that name, was the representative of a noble and chivalrous family, whose origin is lost in the commencement of the second era of the Hungarian sovereigns. Although naturally of an amiable and gentle disposition, he yet nursed a deep and undying hatred towards the Infidels who had so fearfully devastated his native country.

In his infancy he had been hushed to sleep by ballads of love and war, in which the Christian warrior universally carried off both the lady and the victory. In his boyhood he had sat at twilight beside some old follower of his house, whose long gray hairs and many scars had won him honour in the eyes of the brave boy; and listened to wild narra-

tives of Turkish cruelty and knightly prowess, until his heart swelled and his brow burned at the recital. Scarcely had he gained his spurs, nor had he yet attained his twentieth year, when, in 1650, he followed one of his noble kinsmen on an expedition against Csákvar, which the Christians fondly hoped to carry by a *coup-de-main*. The Infidels were, however, prepared for the assault; the attempt, boldly as it was executed, failed; and the young Count Szápáry, whose impetuous bravery had led him into the very teeth of the enemy, was struck down by a Turkish lance, and rescued with extreme difficulty by a band of devoted friends, so severely wounded as to cause great apprehensions that he would not survive his injuries.

But Szápáry had youth, hope, and a good cause to support him through his sufferings; and too high a heart to quail at personal danger. He amused his hours of sickness with dreaming of his battles yet to come; and vowing new vengeance against the crescent of the Moslem. His good weapon was ever within reach of his hand; and as he occasionally drew it from its scabbard, and reverently pressed his lips to its flashing blade, he

swore to himself never to tarnish its lustre by cowardice or dishonour.

When strength returned to his limbs, and vigour to his brow, the young Knight began anew to search for occasions of distinguishing himself in the field; and in those stirring times, when the foot of the patriot was ever in the stirrup, and his hand ever on his lance, these were seldom wanting under leaders of tried valour and well-earned fame.

When the death of his father made him the head of his proud house, Count Peter Szápáry took possession of his extensive estates in the neighbourhood of the contested city of Buda, towards which the eyes and hearts of all the Magyar chivalry were fondly turned. His friend and neighbour was Count Adam Batthyány, who subsequently attained to the highest dignities in the kingdom; and they were worthy to be friends, for each was high-hearted, chivalrous, and vowed to the holy cause of Christianity and freedom. And well did they love each other!

Brothers both in spirit and in arms, they seemed to have but one soul, and one existence; and together they performed such deeds of valour against

the Infidels as made their name a glory to their own land, and a terror to their enemies.

The greatest sufferer from their bold daring was Hansa Bey, then in command at Erd; who was for ever subject to sudden attacks, which thinned his ranks, and crippled his means of defence. He lost soldiers, ammunition, provisions, and money; in short, he lived in perpetual terror, without being able to devise any method of ridding himself of his persevering and hostile neighbours.

Enraged at their constant incursions, and his own incompetency to terminate them, he vowed against the two friends all the bitterness of a Moslem's hate, should the opportunity of revenge ever present itself; but for a time it seemed as though they were gifted with impunity, and the haughty Turk nursed his wrath until it overflowed.

Then it was that Fortune, as if weary of befriending the valiant Magyars, suddenly declared for the Moslem. Szápáry, at the head of his little squadron, fell into an ambuscade; and despite his own efforts, and those of his gallant friend, was eventually made prisoner by the Turks, covered with wounds, and insensible from loss of blood.

Great was the rejoicing in the camp of the Infidels when the identity of their captive was proclaimed ; but none gloated over his triumph like Hansa Bey. His most formidable enemy was in his power ! His revenge was sure ! The condition of Szápáry was, however, so precarious, that the Turk could only solace himself for a time by pouring out upon the Christian captive all the contemptuous epithets with which the language is rife. His wounds were imperfectly dressed, in order to prolong his life ; and when he was slowly recovering, he was subjected to the degrading and torturing punishment of the bastinado, and then marched under a strong guard to Buda, and delivered over to the Vēzir ; with a letter in which his name was branded with abuse, and his actions detailed with a ferocity calculated to heighten and embitter the animosity of his new master.

The missive failed not in its effect. The Pasha smiled as he glanced from the parchment to the prisoner ; and Szápáry read in that tiger-smile an earnest of his fate. He was flung into a noisome dungeon, impervious to every ray of light, and furnished only with a wretched pallet, of which the

straw had begun to perish beneath the heavy damps of the subterranean, and emitted a suffocating odour. His ill-dressed wounds opened afresh beneath the influence of this pestilential atmosphere; and for three horrible days and nights the wretched captive suffered tortures for which language has no words.

But it was not the intention of the Vēsir to allow his prisoner to escape him so soon by death: and accordingly, when it was announced to him that the Christian, if thus abandoned, could not long survive, he gave immediate orders that he should be removed to a less loathsome prison, and that his wounds should be tended with the greatest care. The Infidels had a double purpose in wishing to reserve him to tortures and to indignities—they had a heavy debt to pay for the loss and mortification which he had brought upon their nation; and they hoped also by these means to enhance the ransom which should be offered by his friends.

Who cannot estimate the horrors of captivity to the Infidels during their palmy days of triumph and of power? The most disgusting offices—the hardest and scantiest fare—the most squalid rai-

ment—and the most degrading tasks, became the fate of the young hero who had been loved and honoured in his land from his boyhood up!

And yet there scarcely needed any augmentation of suffering to the stricken Szápáry, beyond the pang of seeing himself unarmed and helpless among the enemies of his nation: and when at some chance moment he could crawl away from his tyrants, and seated in a lonely corner upon the earth, with his face pillowed in his hands, think upon all that he had once been, and that which he now was, his own heart tortured him far more than the dastard blows of his cowardly oppressors.

Nevertheless, he loved those moments of self-communion, bitter as they were; for then rose before him the vision of his wife—the young, the fair, the noble maiden, whom he had won from a host of suitors: nor less dear, that of his infant son, in whose eager hand he had once hoped to place the first weapon—whom he had looked to lead to his first field—and into whose young spirit he had trusted to breathe the burning valour of his own. And then he saw around him troops of valiant friends, with Adam Batthyány at their head;

and he heard the neighing of war-horses, and the clashing of steel ; and his heart bounded, and his brow burned again with joy, until he was aroused from his vain dream of tenderness and glory by a rude blow or a coarse oath ; and once more stood before his Moslem masters, a captive and a slave.

The frequent visits made by Hansa Bey to his friend the Vēzir never failed to augment the sufferings of Szápáry. Some new and ingenious method of torment always followed close upon his presence ; and it was consequently never without a sinking of the heart that the wretched prisoner learnt his arrival at Buda. But he bore the cruelties and indignities heaped upon him with the firmness of a Christian hero, and never stooped to sue for milder treatment.

Thus it was that on one occasion, when Hansa Bey was walking in the fair garden which stretches beside the fortress, and where the unhappy captive was employed in tending the flowers, and that he asked him in a tone of bitter irony how he found himself at Buda, and whether the air was conducive to his health, Szápáry made no reply ; which so exasperated his cowardly conqueror that

he could not controul his rage, and exclaimed passionately: "Dog of a Christian! You have not yet been made to feel your downfall, and you dare to brave your masters; but I swear by the Prophet that I will make you kiss the dust, and grovel at my feet. What are you beside the victorious Moslem but a beast? and as a beast shall you labour for your lords!"

Nor was the threat an idle one; for the morrow saw the noble Magyar, despite his struggles and his indignation, harnessed to a common plough, the task-brother of an ox!

This last indignity broke the proud spirit of the captive. He thenceforward looked up to heaven without hope, and upon his persecutors without dread. He bore the bastinado without a groan, for mere corporeal suffering had no longer a pang for him; and he submitted to his fate with an apathy which is the handmaid of despair.

Let it not be thought, however, that the brave Batthyány had forgotten his friend during his frightful captivity. He had already entered into negociations with Hansa Bey with an energy which only convinced the vindictive Turk of the value attached to

his prisoner, and the consequent profit which he might derive from the circumstance ; and accordingly he dictated the reply of the Vēzir, who fixed the ransom of the Hungarian hero at thirty thousand florins of silver ; a sum not to be easily collected in the impoverished state of the country at that epoch.

The answer was indeed so discouraging, that little hope was entertained of Szápáry's deliverance through this medium. In vain did his devoted wife sacrifice her jewels, reduce her establishment, diminish her household, urge her dependants, and beseech her friends—she was still far from amassing the amount required by his insatiable captors ; but nothing could damp the energies of the faithful wife and the determined friend. All the property of the prisoner and his brother-in-arms which could be made available, was sold ; the contributions of his fellow Magnates were collected ; and yet little more than a moiety of the required sum was realized. Even his peasants contributed their mite ; and still all efforts had proved abortive, when the tenantry and vassals of the captive Magnate resolved to make a general appeal to the nation, to contribute to the restoration of their beloved Suzerain.

Despite, however, the combined exertions of the heart-broken Countess, the anxious friend, and the faithful vassals of the unhappy Szápáry, the desired end was still unattained; for half the country was in the power of the enemy, and the remainder impoverished by pillage, and rather requiring assistance than enabled to afford it; and meanwhile the Turks refused to listen to any other terms. But a power more mighty than that of man was to work out the deliverance of the captive.

The spies of the Count Batthyány discovered that an Aga of high rank, and charged with dispatches of great importance to the Vēzir at Buda, was on his way from Constantinople, with a numerous suite; and the devoted friend swore upon his naked sword, that he would peril his life to capture the ambassador, and save the prisoner. The vow which he made was received and registered; and having ascertained the road by which the Aga was to travel, he placed himself in ambush on his path with all the trusty followers whom he could muster, and awaited with a beating heart the approach of the Moslem messenger.

The Aga soon appeared with a considerable

suite, and the Christian noble threw himself across his path like a hungry lion. The combat was desperate. The Turks fought manfully, in emulation of their chief, who would not surrender, hopeless as his situation soon became ; but whom it was nevertheless difficult to secure, as the Christian Count had forbidden that a blow should be aimed at the Aga himself, being anxious to take him alive. Thus the battle became bloody in the extreme. As fast as a Moslem threw himself before his lord, he was hewn down ; and the spot on which they fought was soon covered with the slain, and slippery with gore.

But Batthyány paused not to contemplate the havoc. He knew that the freedom of his friend depended on the capture of the Aga, and he fought on like a demoniac. Fortune at length favoured him ; the horse of the Aga was shot through the heart, and fell prone to the earth, carrying his rider with him ; and in the next instant the Moslem noble was the prisoner of the Christians.

The gallant band paused for no purposes of plunder ; they left the costly baggage of the Turk to become the booty of the next passer-by, and galloped off to secure the safe keeping of their prize.

The Vēzir no sooner learnt the capture of his illustrious friend and companion in the Faith, than he proceeded to offer terms for his release : but Batthyány fixed it at a sum so immense that the Turk was unable to meet the demand. Negotiations were accordingly set on foot ; and the Christian Knight at length terminated them by declaring that he would exchange the Aga against Count Szápáry, or that he should remain his prisoner.

Despite the reluctance of the Vēzir and the angry opposition of Hansa Bey, these terms were ultimately accepted ; for the Moslem noble was a man of rank, and his captivity was a heavy blow to his friends. The day and hour were fixed ; the contracting parties met on a given spot, and there the barter of life for life was made.

The Vēzir uttered a hearty “Inshallah,” as the Aga moved slowly towards him ; but as Batthyány sprang from his saddle to embrace his adopted brother, he started back in doubt, and for an instant suspected treachery. With difficulty could he believe that the wan, emaciated, feeble wretch before him, with bloodshot eyes, elf-locks, and tangled beard ; clad in rags, and worn down with misery ;

was indeed his gallant friend Peter Szápáry; he for whose love fair women had sighed in secret, and of whose strength and daring his whole nation had made a boast.

One long look, however, sufficed to convince him of the fact; their eyes met—their souls went with them—and after a separation of three long, weary, melancholy years—years of torture to the one, and of anguish to the other, Adam Batthyány and Peter Szápáry were once more locked in each other's arms.

The tenantry and vassals of the ransomed captive had assembled in a body to welcome back their Suzerain; and as they caught a distant glimpse of the gallant band among whom they knew that he was to return, they raised his battle-cry, and galloped madly towards him, pealing it out in triumph; but when the uplifted hand of the Count Batthyány arrested their wild speed, and that they reined up their panting horses, and looked upon the wreck of their beloved lord as he supported himself with difficulty in the saddle, the triumphant shout died away into a death-like silence; and many a brave head was bowed so low that the plumes of

the *Kálpag* by which it was surmounted, served to conceal the tears that streamed from eyes which had never looked to feel a moisture more.

There was no feasting in the halls of Szápáry that day, although the board was already spread ; but there was the clanging of weapons against the stone pavement of the church even till night-fall ; for they who were to have been among the revellers had turned their steps towards the house of God instead of the house of feasting ; and had offered up silent prayers instead of noisy congratulations.

And meanwhile Szápáry was seated once more at his own hearth, with his heart-stricken wife on a low stool at his feet, his friend beside him, and his boy between his knees ; grasping with trembling and unsteady fingers his weapons and his armour, as though the contact brought with it an unimaginable joy. But the smitten warrior could as yet handle them only among friends ; for the exhaustion of his neglected wounds, his heavy chains, and his ulcerated feet, had tamed him into childish weakness ; and it was only the iron nature of his vigorous constitution which ultimately secured to him a slow and painful convalescence.

Scarcely had Szápáry again began to indulge himself in the warlike visions which he so much loved, when a rumour reached him that a powerful army, commanded by the valiant Duke of Lorraine, and several other famous warriors of high rank, who had already signalized themselves at the siege of Vienna, then only just raised, were on the march to wrench from the Infidels the capital of the Apostolical King.

No Hungarian could remain inactive at such a moment; and least of all a spirit like that of Szápáry. The enterprise was sacred; it gave opportunities too dear to the brave to be overlooked or unheeded; and despite the lingering weakness which still oppressed him, he sprang into energy at the news, as the noble stag-hound rouses at the horn of the hunter. Life itself seemed to begin anew for the gallant Magyar; every nerve was strengthened, every muscle restrung; and his patriotic heart beat high as he contemplated the glory to be won by the chivalry of Christianity.

“Talk not to me, my friends;” he exclaimed; “of sufferings and of trials that are passed. I mourned over them while they bowed me down; but the

tempest rends not for ever the mountain-oak ; nor does misfortune burst for ever above the head of him who fights for liberty and for his country.”

The tears of his beloved wife equally failed to deter him as the arguments of his brother-nobles. “ You could not love a coward ;” he said reproachfully, as he pressed her hand to his lips ; “ Deceive not your own heart ; you come of a brave race, and you *could* not ! Would you see the father of your boy dishonoured ? Little would then remain to do, for shame would kill more surely than the Turkish scymetars ; and you would be the first to assert the high blood of your ancestors, and to say ‘ Let Szápáry die, for he has outlived his honour.’ ”

From this hour the hero was as one whose youth has been renewed by some wondrous magic ; he was for ever in the saddle, marshalling his vassals, and urging them to sustain and to revenge their master. He spoke to them too, and he spoke eloquently—for his soul was on his lips—of their thrice-holy Faith which had so long been trampled by the Infidel ; and he bade them fight as brave men should, even to the death, for their God and their Fatherland ! And then he flung himself into the arms of

Batthyány, and murmuring “If I fall, be a brother to my wife, and a kinsman to my children”—he turned away to superintend the progress of his men-at-arms.

At length all was prepared; and accompanied by Batthyány, Szápáry departed for the camp of Lorraine; his high heart exulting as his path was for ever crowded by groups of his countrymen bound for the same glorious goal.

The result of the 2nd of September, 1686, has filled one of the noblest pages of European history, and needs no detail here beyond what may be necessary to shadow out the fortunes of our two Magyar heroes. The battle had been *à l'outrance*, for the possession of the fortress was of vital importance to each party; and thus when it was ultimately recovered by the Christians, the slain were counted by thousands, and the prisoners by hundreds.

Among the latter was the enemy of Szápáry; the haughty Moslem who had drained his life-blood, and battered on his torments; the vindictive Hansa Bey, who had been called to Buda by the Vēzir to reinforce the failing garrison.

When the fight was over, the city taken, and

comparative calm once more established, the conquerors celebrated their victory by a solemn service in the church; and thence the nobles proceeded to take their places at a splendid banquet, hastily spread beneath the beaming of a thousand lamps, whose light was flashed back from glittering weapons, and flashing jewels. As the feast drew near to its conclusion, Lorraine bade the excited Szápáry relate to him the circumstances of his long captivity. He was obeyed; and although the tale was told with a simplicity which tended rather to soften than to exaggerate the cruelty of which he had been the victim, the Captain-General heard it with a knit brow, and a burning cheek.

“The day is ours once more, brave Magyar!” he exclaimed when the tale was ended; “and Hansa Bey is in the power of the Christian. He is yours, Count Szápáry. Do with him as you will.”

“I thank you for the gift, thrice-noble Duke;” was the reply of Szápáry; “You could not have bestowed on me one richer, or more welcome.” And with these simple sentences he turned away to listen to the ingenious devices of torment suggested

by the nobles about him for his captive enemy. He did not, however, join in the discourse; but looked from one to the other as each spoke in turn, sadly and musingly; and meanwhile a servant in the hall, who had been won by the gold of Hansa Bey to bring to his dungeon any tidings which he might be able to gather of his probable fate, stole to the cell of the Moslem, and acquainted him with the transaction by which he had become the personal prisoner of the Count Szápáry. The Turk uttered not a word; but his head sank upon his breast; and his breath came quick and short, as though a feeling grappled at his heart that smothered its pulsations.

Only a short hour elapsed ere the bolts of his prison-chamber were withdrawn, and the two friends stood before him.

“Dost thou recognize me, Bey?” asked a well-known voice; “I am Peter Szápáry; and I come to tell thee that thou art now mine, body and soul.”

“Thou art tardy with the tale;” answered the Moslem moodily; “I learnt the news an hour back; but he who gave Hansa Bey to the Christian slave, knew not of what metal he was made.”

“Canst thou guess thy fate?” asked the Count calmly.

The Moslem smiled in bitterness. “It needs no astrologer to read it;” he said in the same cold tone; “thou wouldest work out thy revenge.”

“Bey!” exclaimed the Magyar; “thy thoughts deceive thee; a Christian seeks not for revenge. We have been fierce foes and bitter enemies, but all that is past—Thou art free—free without ransom or conditions.”

“Tell me that I dream!” faltered the prisoner, roused out of his national apathy, and grasping the arm of his generous deliverer. “You mock me! only tell me that you mock me! There lives not the man on earth capable of such an act as that of which you speak.”

Szápáry persisted, however, in his assurances, and brought Batthyány forward as his pledge. “As a man, and as a soldier;” he said solemnly; “I might, indeed, have sought revenge; but the religion of a Saviour forbids all human vengeance—The Son of God not only taught his followers to pay back evil with good, but himself set the glorious example by praying for his murderers; and in his

name I once more tell you, Hansa Bey, that you are free."

"Too late—too late!" exclaimed the miserable captive, as he flung himself on the earth and clasped the knees of Szápáry: "I cannot live to profit by so bright a lesson; for my heart whispered, when they told me that I was in the hands of him whom I had wronged so deeply, that hope was put far from me. I am a dying man; the burning tide that rushes through my frame like living fire, and leaps about my brain as if to sear it into madness, runs poison through my veins—my hours are numbered, and they are few; but there may yet be time to show me how to find the God who taught so rare a virtue to the Christian; that I may die with his name upon my lips, and waken in his paradise."

Szápáry lingered not an instant in the dungeon; and ere many minutes had elapsed the dying Turk was surrounded by priests and physicians. The first had not a moment to lose, and the latter were useless; but the conversion was nevertheless accomplished. The baptism of the Moslem was instantly followed by the last sacraments; and Hansa Bey was

declared to have been plucked from perdition by the zealous churchmen who had assisted at the ceremonies; while Count Peter Szápáry became in the same hour the sponsor and the chief mourner of his ancient enemy.

CHAPTER VI.

“ You have repaid my ballad with usury, Szápáry ;” said Nicholas Pálffy ; “ and would have succeeded in proving to us, had the conviction been wanting, that the men of your race are as brave and chivalrous as the women are gentle and beautiful. In good sooth, you have done your noble ancestor justice.”

“ He deserves it at the hands of all who bear his name ;” replied Szápáry ; “ for we have reason to be proud of him. Nor am I sorry that while recalling his memory I have for a while transported the party beyond the district of the Wág, for it would almost seem as if that particular portion of Hungary had absorbed most of her exciting memories.”

“ It is not wonderful that such should be the case ;” said Pratnaÿer ; “ for which of us has travelled through a Roman Catholic country without having remarked how judiciously every founder of a religious house has erected his edifice in the

most lovely nook of the neighbourhood? Some smiling valley, where wood and water, and vineyards and sunshine, make a worship of the works of nature to the pious, and a source of profit to the worldly? And upon the same principle, the first invaders of the country naturally sought to establish themselves in the most picturesque and prolific spots, whence they might extend their power over the less promising districts, without risk or inconvenience. Unable to discriminate, save on the mere surface of things, every enemy that has descended on Hungary has successively been fascinated by the precincts of the Wáag; and thus it has become the great emporium of romance and adventure. Scarcely a mountain-peak rises above it which is not crowned with a mouldering stronghold, whose memories have survived it; while there is no doubt that the valley itself is replete with these, did any one consider it expedient to collect them."

"You are right, Baron;" said Pálffy; "every stone about the Wáag has its story; and I can tell one of peasant life which I picked up, if indeed the ladies care to hear it, that struck me at the time as worthy of remembrance."

The offer was immediately accepted; and Pálffy accordingly told the tale of—

THE MARGITTA ROCK.

The beautiful valley of the Wáag, and its circling chain of mountains, are alike rich in legendary lore; and it would seem by the dark character of many of the old traditions connected with that most lovely portion of all Hungary, as though man, with his fierce pride and his base passions, had sought to mar their brightness by terrible associations; for scarcely does one tale treat of love, or innocence, or joy. All are dimmed, if not darkened, by records of violence and crime, such as surely never should have been engendered and indulged amid scenes of so pure and calm a nature.

Where the shallow and picturesque raft, gliding down the rapid current of the river, after passing beneath the gloomy shadow of the mouldering fortress of Thurutz, enters the county of Trenschin, the careful boatman admonishes his less-accustomed passengers to sit motionless each in his place, and to offer up fervent prayers to Our Lady and the Saints, that the danger which they are about to

encounter may be averted. This danger, which appears in the shape of a precipitous rock rising abruptly and perpendicularly in the channel of the stream, is indeed of no trivial description; as by impeding the impetuous current of the river, it throws back the waves in wild and foaming breakers, and renders it difficult for the helmsman to detect the narrow channel through which alone his frail craft can pass in safety.

Numerous are the accidents which occur beneath this rocky wall, whose smooth and slippery surface defies the clinging fingers of the drowning wretch who struggles with the resistless breakers; nor is the peril past when the point is rounded, for immediately beyond this, a line of sharp and pointed rocks, called the Margitta, traverses the river across its entire bed, against which the waves toss and roar in thunder, howling their warning of destruction to him who may not be sufficiently skilful to force his bark between them.

This impediment surmounted, all is tranquil and secure; and the boatman lifts his woollen cap, and crosses his breast in gratitude, without one care for the future; and then, with that morbid love of the

terrible so strangely inherent in human nature, coupled with a feeling of honest vanity in his own superior skill, he hastens to entertain his re-assured passengers with sad tales of the tragedies which have taken place under the Margitta Rock.

I remember that on one occasion I made this little voyage in company with half a dozen other nobles, who had been like myself enjoying the chase on the estates of the Count Eüdödi. We occupied a couple of rafts, the foremost being freighted with ourselves, a gallant stag that we had shot in the forest, and a pile of feathered game; while our attendants and a couple of slaughtered wild boar were the lading of the second.

We had passed a glorious week; living as hunters should do, upon the produce of our rifles, to which an added zest was given by cool draughts of Hei-delshermmer and Imperial Tokayer; and after the fatigue of an expedition in which each had striven to be foremost, the soothing inaction consequent on this species of travelling was by no means unwelcome; while to a group of stout, active, and hardy young men, who had sufficient faith in their nerve

and muscle to enable them to reject the fear of drowning, although the possibility of a capsize was great enough to render it expedient to prepare for a vigorous battle with the hissing and bellowing waves, even the excitement attendant on the approach to the Margitta Rock was not without its charm.

Our principal steersman was a noble fellow, standing more than six feet high, with long curls of black and glossy hair streaming upon his shoulders; whiskers and mustachios equally elaborate in their degree; and eyes which seemed as though they could pierce the very rock towards which we were floating down. In short he was the village Adonis; and might well have preserved his supremacy on a wider stage.

His muscle was tremendous; and when occasionally he drove us from the bank with his iron-shod pole, the light raft quivered as it obeyed the impulse. Altogether there was something about the man which interested me; and I entered into conversation with him, as my more legitimate companions, when once we had passed the Margitta (which we did in gallant style, without any other inconvenience than that which the flying spray in-

flicted upon us in impotent disappointment), gradually yielding to the heat of the noontide sun, fell one after the other into a deep and quiet sleep.

I found him as intelligent as he was handsome; and after a time, when he became more at his ease, and had answered all my professional queries, he made an allusion to the gaunt rock which we had lately passed, and remarked that it was well worthy of the deed to which it owed its name.

This mention of a tradition delighted my idleness; so, stretching my limbs into a most luxurious elongation, pillowing my head on my sheepskin *bunda*,* and replenishing my meerschaum, I desired Istvan, for so was my magnificent Charon called, to give me a sketch of this local legend.

In the olden time—he had no knowledge of dates, and I liked him the better for it, as names and dates often weaken a story—he told me that there lived in that part of the country an aged peasant; who, weary of widowhood, and not satisfied with the companionship of his young and beautiful daughter Margitta, the only child of his dead wife,

* Cloak.

resolved once more to risk the perils of matrimony ; and in order to make a hopeful venture, became the husband of a girl of whom he might with more propriety have been the father.

The bridegroom's hair was gray, his brow furrowed, and his step feeble ; but he had flocks, and herds, and cornfields, and vineyards ; and the young bride wilfully shut her eyes to the defects of the man himself, in order to profit by his possessions.

A weary bridal was that for the poor and pretty Margitta ! From the hour in which her step-mother entered the house as its mistress, she felt that for her all home-comfort was gone ; for even could the mercenary bride have forgotten that the child of her old husband must necessarily inherit a portion of his wealth, she could not forgive the loveliness which threw her own coarser beauty into the shade ; nor the fact that she owed all the courtesies of the village youth to the attractions of the fair girl who dwelt beneath the same roof.

For a time the misguided old man who had brought this scourge to his own hearth, hoped, and tried to believe, that when they had become more

habituated to each other's presence, his jealous and vindictive wife would cease to persecute the shrinking and helpless girl, whose only reply to every taunt was tears. But he was soon painfully disabused; for the gentleness of Margitta so irritated the violent temper of the new-made wife, that from words her tyranny grew into blows; and while his child bore even these without a murmur, they broke the old man's heart; and he was followed to his grave by some who pitied his fate, but by more who blamed his weakness.

Thenceforward, the existence of Margitta became one perpetual penance; and her cheek was growing pale, and her step heavy, when one of the handsomest youths in the village offered himself as herdsman to the widow, and was instantly engaged. Many marvelled that he who might have pushed his fortune in the castle of some noble, to whom his fine person might have rendered him an acceptable attendant, should thus limit his ambition; but Margitta was not long ere she read his secret, and paid him back the love he bore her, with an intensity which those only can understand who are alone in the world, and whose feelings, like the un-

trained tendrils of the vine, have been suffered to trail abroad, and to be trodden under foot and crushed, for lack of something to which they may cling.

Her step-mother's violence had no longer any terrors for Margitta. One look into the eyes of her lover overpaid all the rebukes and blows which were liberally bestowed upon her from sunrise to sunset; she desponded no longer—hope had sprung up within her heart—that sweet hope which is born of affection, and lives on gentleness. She wondered why the river had never before been so bright, nor the earth so beautiful; and as she plied her tasks, she carolled in the lightness of her young and gladsome spirit, and forgot that she had ever wished to die.

For awhile all was calm beneath the widow's roof; but unfortunately that calm was of short duration, for it grew out of a grievous error. The widow still young and vain, and conscious that her newly-acquired wealth could not fail to enhance her personal attractions, had never doubted for a moment that the handsome herdsman had become her inmate solely in the hope that he might ultimately become her husband; nor was she unwilling

that his fortunes should equal his ambition: and thus she lived on from day to day in a fool's paradise, giving smile for smile; and each night, as she laid her head upon her pillow, believing that the morrow must decide her destiny; until at an unfortunate moment she discovered that the magnet which attracted the dark-eyed Adonis to the cottage was her despised and persecuted step-child.

“Hell has no fury like a woman scorned;”

and the widow could not conceal from herself that the young herdsman must be fully aware of the passion with which he had inspired her; a conviction which set the seal on her vindictiveness and hatred towards the beautiful Margitta.

For some days she brooded over her revenge; and the dark schemes from which she had shrunk in horror when they first rose upon her imagination, became less revolting as she grew accustomed to their idea; while she writhed as she remembered that each hour which she was wasting in inaction was fraught with happiness to her step-child and the ungrateful herdsman.

At length the hour of vengeance came: the fiend had grappled at her heart until it was

turned into gall; and indurated her woman-nature into ferocity; but she veiled her malignant feelings beneath a manner unusually bland and gentle, and so effectually lulled suspicion, that both Margitta and her lover began to hope that a change had come over her nature.

While things were in this state she one day directed the obedient girl to carry a letter to a kinsman of her own who lived near Thurotz; and Margitta at once prepared for her journey, by folding her heavy cloak about her, and stealing away to say farewell to her lover. This was precisely what her ferocious step-mother had anticipated; and without the delay of a moment she left the house, and walked rapidly onward in the direction which the unhappy girl must follow along the river-bank.

The path which she was compelled to pursue led her across the ledge of rock to which allusion has been already made as traversing the bed of the stream; and it was on the summit of the precipice beyond, that the widow lay in wait to surprise her victim; who came fearlessly to the difficult pass, singing a wild national melody, and

thinking of her betrothed ; without one misgiving of the frightful fate which there awaited her ; but she had scarcely placed her foot upon the first point of rock, and shaken back her long ringlets in order to discern her path more clearly, when with a loud and bitter cry the revengeful woman flung herself upon the astonished and terrified girl ; struck her to the earth ; and despite her wild and phrenzied shrieks dragged her to the edge of the abyss where the waves were maddest, and thence hurled her over !

As the struggling Margitta disappeared beneath the foam which covered her like a shroud, the wretched murderess at once awoke to a sense of her unholy crime. But the deed was done : and as she hung madly over the precipice, and called in bitter agony upon the name of her victim, she was answered only by the roaring of the breakers, and the mysterious echoes which reverberated from the rock.

On the morrow a couple of peasants discovered the body of the ill-fated girl entangled among some masses of stone, towards which it had been swept by the violence of the current. Her long sunny hair was floating upon the tide, and her white arms were putting to shame the gleaming spray that

was dashing furiously about her, chafed at this new impediment.

Each recognised her as they drew her to the bank : and for awhile they believed that her foot had failed upon the slippery rock, and that she had fallen from the dizzy height. But as they hung over her, one of them raised her small cold hand ; and there, closely clutched within her slender fingers, they found a fragment of bright-coloured cotton which was instantly identified as a portion of a dress well known to belong to the widow ; and with this damning witness of the crime carefully replaced in the hand of the corse, they bore their pale burthen to the village, amid the tears and murmurs of the simple inhabitants ; and carried it across the threshold of what had been its home, where it was met only by the agonized lover, whose despair was fearful to witness ; and whose emotion as they gave into his charge the morsel of print, became uncontrollable and furious.

All violence was, however, vain. A night of wandering in the woods, where she had been in imagination hunted down by the spectre of her victim, had made a maniac of the murderess : and when, on her next

involuntary approach to the village, she was seen and immediately pursued by some of the young peasants, she fled howling and gesticulating before them, until she reached the precipitous rock from which she had hurled her miserable step-child; where, tossing her arms wildly in the air, she shrieked out the name of the murdered Margitta, and flung herself headlong into the gulf.

For a few hours the pure waters of the Wáag were polluted by her corse; but it was ultimately dragged to land, and laid to rest in consecrated ground.

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